

Introduction to the Course: **Ethics for Living and Leading**



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Course Description:

This course on ethics seeks to develop the relevance, foundations, substance and processes of ethical thought and action that need to be understood and practiced by Christian leaders of integrity and spiritual maturity. This course offers insight into the contrasting visions of our world and the alternative systems of moral values resulting from these divergent worldviews. An understanding of these visions and values should help Christians better appreciate why they feel pulled in conflicting moral directions and why it is not always easy to follow Jesus' moral teaching and example. Specific issues that Christians need to confront are discussed in light of biblical teaching and practice. However, the actual process of choosing how to live faithfully as a follower of Jesus also requires wisdom, courage, decisiveness and responsible action by individual Christians as well as Christian communities.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of the course, you should be able to:

- Make better informed, biblically resourced ethical decisions;
- State the five major patterns for justifying ethical decisions and explain their strengths and weaknesses;
- Write analyses of situations which raise ethical considerations according to the RESOLVEDD method;
- Assess your own ethical "fitness" and state what you can do to increase your ethical fitness level;
- Describe the different biblical resources that are available for developing a Christian approach to ethical issues;
- Explain various ways worldviews influence moral reasoning, determine the worldview of your context, and indicate how this worldview influences how ethical decision making takes place;
- Relate "secularized" general ethical principles (such as the Equal Consideration of Interests) to Christian ethics;
- Articulate considerations important for a wide spectrum of ethical issues that need contextual clarification, appropriate decisions and sustained action by Christian communities if they are to live out the implications of the Gospel;
- Evaluate "codes of conduct" developed by organizations and indicate their role within the process of developing an ethical culture within an organization;
- State the ways in which ethics fits into the role of the transformational or servant leader who is a follower of Jesus Christ.

Required Reading:

John R. W. Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, 4th Edition (Zondervan, 2006).

Module Units:

- I. Introduction
 - Unit 1: What is Ethics? (What ethics is, and why it matters)
 - Unit 2: How Do Leaders Become Ethically Fit? (By the long process of discipleship; learning by doing)
- II. Ethical Foundations
 - Unit 3: Where Do We Find Resources for Ethical Guidance? (The Bible as the foundation for Christian ethics and worldview)
 - Unit 4: How Do We Make Sense of What to Do in Real Life? (The role and impact of careful analysis and the necessity of wisdom)
 - Unit 5: How Do We Make Ethical Decisions? (A process for ethical decision making)
[RESOLVEDD]
- III. Ethical Reasoning
 - Unit 6: Where Do We Find Dependable Ethical Foundations? (By listening to Moses and Jesus in Scripture)
 - Unit 7: What is the Central Challenge of Christian Ethics? (How we treat other people)
 - Unit 8: How Do We Live Ethically In Our Relationships? (Loving others according to the pattern of Jesus)
 - Unit 9: Ethics and Culture: What's the Difference? (The need for good hermeneutics and careful reading of the Bible)
- IV. Organizations and Ethical Decision Making
 - Unit 10: What is Involved in the Ethics of Organizations? (Instilling a culture of responsibility)
- V. Review of Ethics
 - Unit 11: Reviewing the Ethics of Leadership
- VI. Applied Ethics Resources
 - Unit 12: Readings in Ethics and Worldviews
 - Unit 13: Resources for Ethics—Codes, Cases and Resources (digital file)

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Course Information

Introduction & Overview

This course in “Ethics for Living and Leadership” is one of several courses leading to a Masters degree in Organizational Leadership. It is preceded by other courses that stress Christian values of integrity, justice, love and righteousness. You may have taken the course on Integrity and Finance, which emphasizes the importance of Christian organizational leaders exhibiting integrity based on biblical values. Another core course in the curriculum is Spiritual Formation, which offers a sound method for leaders to grow spiritually through proven spiritual disciplines. This course on ethics seeks to expose the relevance, the foundations, the substance and the processes of ethical thought and action that need to be understood and practiced by leaders of integrity and spiritual maturity.

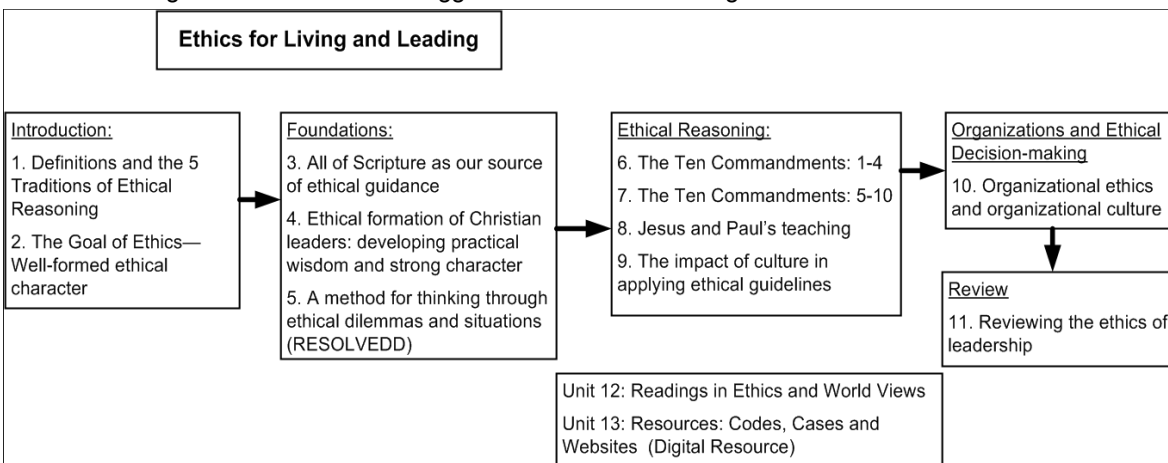
At a recent international conference, a group of men and women from many different countries of Asia, Africa, Latin America, Europe and North America discussed ways of preparing leaders for the church of the future. The outstanding point of consensus among them was not a need for more leaders or even more competent leaders, but for more Christ-like leaders. In this way, the conferees identified what this course is designed to accomplish. In other words, this course seeks to help us all become more Christ-like in the ways we address the practical issues of life and leadership with which we must deal on a daily basis.

In brief, Christian ethical thought and actions are guided by the moral standards by which God desires his people to live regardless of who they are, where they live or what they do. Because Christian ethics focus on God’s will for us and how to accomplish God’s will, the central subject of this course is appropriate for all Christians, not just Christians in a particular geographical region or a particular culture. It applies to all men, women and youth who are children of God and who sincerely want to please him.

Course Structure

This course is composed of twelve units. These units are designed so that a person will need 18-22 weeks on average to complete the readings and carry out the tasks. You should expect to devote *approximately 6 hours a week* to complete the assignments of this course. It is designed so the Masters student with average reading and writing skills can finish the units in *approximately 130 hours of work*. It involves thoughtful engagement with the written materials, responses to tasks that accompany the texts, completion of assignments to be sent to the professor at the end of each unit, and application of ethical decision making to a specific issue in your own context in the form of a final project.

The arrangement of the units is suggested below in the listing of the modules:



Course Expectations

There are readings in Unit 12 that offer insight into the contrasting visions of our world and the alternative systems of moral values resulting from these divergent worldviews. An understanding of these visions and values should help Christians to appreciate more fully why they feel pulled in conflicting moral directions and why it is not always easy to follow Jesus’ moral teaching and example.

The short written lectures offer guidance in both understanding and living out the truth of how God wants us to live. Specific issues that Christians need to face are discussed in light of biblical teaching and practice. However, the actual process of choosing how to live faithfully as a follower of Jesus also requires wisdom, decisions and responsible action by individual Christians as well as Christian communities.

Note on Method: How do you make yourself interact in a serious way with what you read? Here is a suggestion that may help, not only as you read, but also as you prepare your assignments. In this course,

whenever you read something that is new to you, mark the passage or idea in some special way, perhaps with an exclamation mark (!) in the margin next to the text. Whenever you read something with which you initially disagree, mark that passage or idea in a different way, perhaps with a question mark (?) in the margin. This will leave a visible trail for you to identify what you are learning and to what you may want to return for further analysis and study.

Note on Process: In each unit there are interactive tasks, usually marked by subtitles such as: “For your reflection,” and “Think about this.” These indicators request that you stop reading to consider your own experience and to analyze the issue being discussed. Because moral leadership and ethical decision making are not solitary activities of individuals, we are asking that when you complete your personal work on each unit that you discuss the results of your interactive tasks in a group with two other people. You will share your thinking with them and ask for their feedback—agreement, disagreement, or additional ideas. *Ideally*, this group will be composed of one other cohort member in your course as well as one person who is not taking the course. When you send your assignments to your professor you will be asked to confirm that you have indeed completed this part of the process for each of the units for which you do formal assignments.

Our hope is that this course will be useful to you as you encourage the Christians in your organization and community to live as committed disciples of Jesus Christ. We pray that what you do with what you learn will be used by God to enable other Christians to see their lives progressively transformed to resemble the character of Jesus Christ. (Please read Ephesians 4:13.) We also pray that it will be helpful to you personally as you face the moral challenges of living as a faithful follower of Jesus and as a leader of his people in a fallen world.

Who are we?

Three of us have contributed parts of this course. One is from the Democratic Republic of Congo (Rev. Dr. Paul Mpindi), another from Cameroon (Rev. Moussa Bongoyok), and a third from North America (Dr. Jack Robinson). First of all, we are people seeking to follow Jesus as his disciples. We are each blessed with a godly wife and growing children. We have each filled leadership roles in our respective countries and have done doctoral studies as well. Each of us teaches in a different biblical, theological or pastoral discipline at the Bangui Evangelical School of Theology in the Central African Republic. Together, we seek to equip leaders to serve God’s people as they carry out his mission in the world. We also want to live in this world in a manner that honors God and encourages our sisters and brothers in Christ to do so as well.

Although our experiences are centered in Africa and many of the following cultural observations reflect an African context, participants from non-African backgrounds are invited to think about parallels from with their own social and cultural contexts. Are there significant similarities or differences between them? We hope such reflection will prove to be fruitful for all those who follow this course.

Dr. David Fraser from North America is the editor, reviser, and rewriter of this course. He is an ordained Presbyterian pastor with a doctorate in Theological Ethics and a long-term interest in East Asia. His work has included pastoring churches, working with World Vision, teaching and administrating in university and seminary life (Eastern University and Palmer Seminary). He has been an occasional visiting lecturer at the Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology in Kenya. He is currently the director of the MA program for Development Associates International. He is married with two children and three grandchildren.

Some Personal Convictions That We Bring to This Course

1. Through the study of Christian ethics people can learn more of what pleases God and how to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ.
2. Christian ethics seeks to answer questions of Christian living in light of what God has revealed to us in the Scriptures and in Christ, within real life contexts of followers of Christ.
3. Studying Christian ethics begins as an intellectual process that requires both understanding God’s truth and also thinking clearly about what it means for our lives, for people usually act based on what they think and believe. The Apostle Paul called Christians to have renewed minds in 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.

The goal of such study is well-formed character that is able to respond faithfully and obediently in the face of difficult and often ambiguous situations.

4. With minds renewed by the Scriptures, Christians are positioned to make decisions and perform actions that faithfully accomplish God's will as they probe the complexities of situations and networks of stakeholders involved in making good ethical decisions.
5. Ethics is a form of moral wisdom that comes from deep engagement with the practical realities of everyday life in given cultural contexts and an understanding of what living and acting Christianly means in those contexts. The process of acquiring such wisdom and being shaped into ethically "fit" leaders involves a long process of discipleship and practical experience leading to moral wisdom.

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Glossary:

1. **Adiaphora**: (plural: adiaphora from the Greek ἀδιάφορα "indifferent things") was a concept used in Stoic philosophy to indicate things which were outside of moral law– that is, actions which are neither morally mandated nor morally forbidden. Christian faith takes these to be matters not regarded as essential to faith but nevertheless as permissible for Christians or allowed in the church and the conduct of believers. In the New Testament, this included things like eating meat sacrificed to idols or the observances of special days.
2. **Agape**: This word represents divine, unconditional, self-sacrificing, active, volitional, and thoughtful love. It is the ideal for our relationships with other humans, epitomized in the love God shows for us in Christ.
3. **Antinomianism**: (from the Greek *αντι*, "against" + *νομος*, "law"), or lawlessness. It is the idea that we are under no obligation to obey the laws of ethics or morality as presented by the Scripture. Antinomianism is the polar opposite of legalism, the notion that overstresses obedience to a code of ethics or standards of behavior as the essential way to salvation. Antinomianists justify conduct that is recognizably licentious by an appeal to the reality that "Christ has set us free from the law."
4. **Asceticism**: Refers to a lifestyle of discipline in order to train the passions and bring them under control. The adjective *ascetic* derives from the ancient Greek term *askēsis* (practice, training or exercise). Originally associated with any form of disciplined practice, the term *ascetic* has come to mean anyone who practices a renunciation of worldly pursuits to achieve higher intellectual and spiritual goals.
5. **Consequentialism** refers to those moral theories which hold that the consequences of a particular action form the basis for any valid moral judgment about that action. Thus, from a consequentialist standpoint, a morally right action is one that produces a good outcome or consequence.
6. **Context or situation**: The circumstances in which an event occurs; a setting with the people, culture and role relationships involved.
7. **Deontological or rule-based ethics**: (Greek: *δέον* (*deon*) meaning 'obligation' or 'duty') is an approach to ethics that focuses on the rightness or wrongness of actions themselves, as opposed to the rightness or wrongness of the consequences of those actions. "Let justice be done though the heavens fall!" is one of its proud slogans. It is sometimes described as ethics based on "duty" or "obligation" because deontologists believe that ethical rules "bind you to your duty". This is also called rule-based ethics. The rules are absolute and binding.
8. **Double effect**: The principle of double effect (*also known as the rule or doctrine of double effect*) is a set of ethical criteria for evaluating the permissibility of acting when one's otherwise legitimate act will also cause an effect one would normally be obliged to avoid. For example, relieving a terminally ill patient's pain with the result of the patient's death. Double effect originates in the thought of Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologiae*, II-IIae Q. 64, a.7). This set of criteria states that an action having

foreseen harmful effects which are practically inseparable from the good effect (for example, the deaths of innocent noncombatants in an act of war) is justifiable if the upon satisfaction of the following:

- a. the nature of the act is itself good, or at least morally neutral;
 - b. the agent intends the good effect and not the bad either as a means to the good or as an end itself;
 - c. the good effect outweighs the bad effect in circumstances sufficiently grave to justify causing the bad effect (for example, the military target has significant enough importance), and the agent exercises due diligence to minimize the harm.
9. **Emotivism:** is the ethical theory that ethical judgments are primarily *expressions* of one's own attitude (emotions). Ethical *imperatives* are not about an objective good or evil but are meant to change the attitudes and actions of another. To say "do not kill" is to say "I do not like killing, and I want you to feel negatively about it as well."
 10. **Eschatology:** (from the Greek *ἔσχατος*, *Eschatos* meaning "last") is the part of theology concerned with the final events in the history of the world, or the ultimate destiny of humanity, commonly referred to as the end of the world. In the Bible, ethics is always conditioned by the vision of the final things in the Kingdom of God. That final state of peace, justice and love provide ethical ideals that shape notions of what Christians should do in this age before Jesus returns.
 11. **Ethics:** is the study of things that are morally right or wrong and a theory of why those things are right and wrong.
 12. **Golden mean:** is the desirable middle between two extremes, one of excess and the other of deficiency. In virtue ethics, many virtues are a "golden mean" between excess and deficiency. Courage is the golden mean between rash recklessness and timidity; prudence (practical wisdom) is the golden mean between impulsiveness and indecisiveness. Aristotle is best known for this viewpoint.
 13. **Habits:** are acquired or learned patterns of conduct that are nearly automatic because of repetition. A well-ingrained habit is so deep that people enact given conduct easily and normally with pleasure.
 14. **Ideal:** is a principle, goal or state of affairs seen as the final end. Creation and the Final Things both set ideals for human life and conduct. They express the perfect will of God for Creation as it was originally designed before it was marred with sin.
 15. **Interim ethics:** is the view that some ethical standards and approaches are designed only for a limited period of time. Some viewed Jesus' Sermon on the Mount as an extreme, ascetic ethic, meant for a short period of time before the advent of the Kingdom of God would bring ordinary history to an end. Therefore, people should not marry and should divest themselves of all their wealth. Most do not see the Sermon on the Mount in this way. Others talk about emergency orders or ethics, referring to principles put into place after the fall to give order to a fallen humanity before it is fully redeemed in the Kingdom of God. Therefore, there is now a need for police and coercive violence in order to deal with the sinfulness of human affairs. However, these ethical permissions and conditions are relevant only for the interim between Creation and Consummation, when they will no longer be necessary.
 16. **Morality:** is used in this course as a synonym for ethics. Morals have to do with those principles and standards that tell a community what is right and wrong. The customs, values and approved patterns of conduct make up morality.
 17. **Narrative:** also known as story, describes a sequence of fictional or nonfictional events. It derives from the Latin verb *narrare*, which means "to recount." The majority of the Bible is narrative, recounting the events, people, and speech of humans and God as they live with each other.
 18. **Natural law:** also known as the law of nature, (Latin: *lex naturalis*) is a theory that posits the existence of a law whose content is set by nature (as created by God), and, therefore, has validity everywhere. The phrase *natural law* is sometimes opposed to the positive law of a given political community, society, or nation-state, and thus can function as a standard by which to criticize that human law.
 19. **Orders of Creation:** refers to the idea that creation was ordered not only in nature but also in culture. It refers to a doctrine asserting God's hand in establishing social domains such as the family, the church, the state and the economy. Although it is commonly traced back to early Lutheranism, the doctrine is also discussed within Reformed Christianity and modern Judaism. Dutch Reformed theology has used it to establish "sphere sovereignty," meaning that each of these spheres (family, religion, the state, the economy) has its own distinctive competence and values that should not

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impinge upon or violate the other spheres God has established for healthy social life. These orders are used to establish area principles and values in ethics.

20. **Policy:** is a deliberate plan of action to guide decisions and achieve rational outcome(s). Policy is usually a statement of an officially approved approach to handle repetitive or common situations and to guide decision making in that situation.
21. **Post-modernity:** is the theory that the basic assumptions and norms of modernity have changed so much that we now live in a new era. It usually means we are no longer living under a grand narrative (meta-narrative), whether the Christian view of history or the modernist account of evolutionary progress. There are no universal stories or norms. We are also “post-Capitalist” and “post-Socialist” in our economic structures as globalization undermines traditional powers of the state and bounded cultures. The notions of progress, of absolute knowledge, of “meaning” as universals are passé. All is now shown to be relative and limited.
22. **Practice:** is a patterned way of doing something (such as the practice of playing the violin or of painting). It is also a standard, conventional or traditional method for doing something.
23. **Relativism:** concerns normative or evaluative claims that modes of thought, standards of reasoning or the like are only right or wrong relative to a framework or given context. There are no “universals” that are true in all situations. All knowledge, including ethical claims, is relative to the people, the situation, the context and the cultural assumptions in which they are embedded.
24. **Rigorism:** is an approach that insists on strictness in judgment and conduct. It is often associated with the view that in matters of moral doubt, one must always follow the stricter course of action. It also refers to some who view all matter as evil (thus rejecting communion, marriage and sexual relations).
25. **Sinful:** refers to something that violates the will and way of God. It is characterized as iniquity, unrighteous, perverted, i.e., something that is morally bad.
26. **Structures:** refers to the interrelation or arrangement of parts in a complex entity such as the “structure” of the economy or “social structure.” This acknowledges that ethics deals not only with the conduct of agents but also with the resulting “structures” that arise due to repetitive patterns of behavior and culture. Ethics is concerned with structures as well as with individual conduct.
27. **Two kingdoms:** is the Lutheran doctrine that God has different principles of operation in the Church (grace, Gospel, Spirit) than in the State (law, reason, coercion). The Two Kingdoms argues that there are related, complementary spheres of God’s will that are run by their autonomous principles and demand different duties from us. As Christian, I live by the Gospel and love. As Citizen (and policeman or magistrate), I live by laws established by reason and enforce the protection of justice by using deadly force if necessary. This approach underlines the importance of my role in deciding what ethical imperatives are relevant.
28. **Utilitarianism:** suggests that the morally correct course of action consists of the greatest good for the greatest number, that is, of maximizing the total benefit without regard to the distribution of benefits and burdens. What makes something right is the utility it creates for people. This is a form of consequentialism.
29. **Values:** are items that are esteemed and sought after as worthy or desirable. Many organizations now create “Core Values” as a way of focusing on key performance standards and ethical ideals which they wish to characterize the decisions and conduct of their organization and its members.
30. **Virtue:** is moral excellence or righteousness. Usually this is considered a character trait of a person who can easily and with pleasure enact moral excellence in given areas. Virtue ethics is a stream of thought that stresses character formation as the end goal of ethical instruction and training.

Ethics for Living and Leading

Unit 1

What is Ethics?



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Unit 1 - What is Ethics?

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Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this unit you will be able to:

- State what ethics is about and how it differs from customs, conventions, laws and morals;
- Designate, define and illustrate five of the major ways of reasoning people follow to justify their ethical decisions and actions;
- Understand the outline of the course and the steps we will take to explore ethics from a Christian perspective.

Steps to Complete Unit 1

Read and Respond

Read the lecture notes in the workbook. From time to time there will be space to respond as you read the text. Please follow the instructions before continuing your reading.

Some readings are included at the end of most units. These texts provide biblical and cultural frameworks for an adequate understanding of Christian ethics. Please reflect and respond as indicated in assignments found within the texts. Be sure to read Appendix A to this unit. It gives a quick introduction to how rules or laws can be understood and used.

Supplementary text: John R. W. Stott, Issues Facing Christians Today, 4th Edition (Zondervan, 2006). For Unit 1, please read **Stott, pp. 23-47** "Our Changing World: Is Christian Involvement Necessary?"

Note: Complete the final email assignments for each of the units as assigned by the course assignment sheet. Send your work to the professor after completing each assignment from that course assignment sheet. Not all units require reporting.

Introduction

"How the mighty are fallen!" (2 Sam 1:19). David's lament over the death of Saul and Jonathan in battle with the Philistines has become emblematic of distress over great leaders being lost. Some are struck down by disease or a plane crash that sweeps them away at the height of their powers. Others step off a moral cliff, having made poor ethical choices. They bring down not only their career but sometimes also whole companies.

Kenneth Lay, son of a Baptist preacher and himself a trustee in a Methodist Church in Houston, Texas (USA), was chairman and CEO of Enron. Formed in the 1980s out of several energy companies, Enron rose swiftly to become a dominant force in the field of energy trading (it was the seventh largest corporation in the USA in 2000). *Fortune* magazine voted it "the most innovative company of the year" in 2000. Kenneth Lay was a much honored, highly respected Christian businessman.¹ At his peak, he was worth \$400 million. By any account, it was a story of fantastic success.

Lay told one interviewer: "The Bible is very clear that we each need to be the best we can be to realize our God-given potential." People of faith "know they've got a much higher force looking over them. They've got Somebody guiding them, directing them, really wanting them to succeed, and even showing them and telling them how to succeed."

When Enron was forced to file for bankruptcy in December 2001, it was the largest filing of its kind in USA history at that time. The world learned that its prowess and reputation was built on illusion, false numbers and a lot of public relations hype. The shady dealings, the off-book accounts (some 9,000 such deals) and the lies fed to employees and the public were exposed. Kenneth Lay was still recommending the company's stock at the same time he and other top executives were cashing in their shares and bailing out. At a subsequent trial, Lay was convicted of eleven counts of securities fraud, wire fraud and making false and misleading statements.

What happened? How is it that an active Christian could fall so dramatically? He was raised in a Christian home, served as an officer in a Methodist church and led an innovative and dynamic company.

There are more sides to this story. Kenneth Lay was not the sole actor in this tragedy. He had lots of collaborators and partners in this mischief. There were other top executives who were even more active in the wheeling and dealing. There was the auditing company, Arthur Anderson (now defunct) that gave a clean bill of health to Enron's finances year after year. What about Vinson and Elkins, the company's law firm? It too signed off on various dubious financial deals and made large profits for doing so. What about the Board of Directors? They were condoning the off-book deals and other dubious accounting schemes, and they voted twice to allow company executives to pursue interests contrary to company policy.

Then there was the whistle-blower. She was a lower-tier employee—Vice President Sherron Watkins. Her honesty, intelligence and moral courage told her that she could not live with the falsehoods and deceptions of Enron. She was also a sincere Christian—a member of a Presbyterian church in Houston.

How did two active Christians look at the same reality, come to very different decisions and take diametrically opposite actions? How can two active Christian leaders face the same situation, and yet, one erodes his integrity and blinds his conscience while the other stands up and does the right thing, despite

¹ Among the honors and recognitions were:

- Kiwanis Club of Houston and the Greater Houston Partnership – International Executive of the Year
- March of Dimes – Award of Distinction
- NAACP Freedom Fund Banquet – Mickey Leland Humanitarian Award
- National Conference of Christians and Jews – Brotherhood Award
- Oswego State University – Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters Degree
- Phi Beta Kappa – Outstanding Alumnus Award
- Private Sector Council – Annual Leadership Award
- Stanford Business School Alumni Associations – Houston Business Man of the Year
- Texas Association of Minority Business Enterprises – Texas Corporate Partnering Award
- Texas Business Hall of Fame – Inductee
- Texas Society To Prevent Blindness – Man of Vision Award
- The Rotary Club of Houston – Distinguished Citizen Award
- The Wall Street Transcript – Chief Executive Officer Award
- U.S. Navy – Navy Commendation Medal & National Defense Service Medal
- University of Colorado, College of Business and Administration – Ben K. Miller Memorial, International Business Award
- University of Houston – Distinguished Alumnus Award
- University of Houston – Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters Degree
- University of Missouri – Honorary Doctor of Law Degree; The Hebert J. Davenport Society Benefactor Award

the cost? Why did so many other professing Christians in this organization turn a blind eye to the practices and do nothing about this giant scam?

There are no simple answers. We all face tough choices. Sometimes we avoid them. Other times we face them. Sometimes we resolve them. Other times we agonize over them and the possible outcomes of different lines of action. We remain confused about what we ought to do. If we do seek to resolve them, we discover that it takes more than simple good will and a good heart to get it right.

Think About It

Answer Box # 1

What do you think is at stake in this example? How would you characterize Ken Lay's ethical situation?

It may be that our simpler choices consist of right against wrong. Even then people choose what is wrong. The choice is simple. But the courage and the strength of character to do what is right, even at a personal cost, are not in abundant supply. Kenneth Lay and his colleagues faced right against wrong choices. However, the money promised from the wrong decision was so substantial that it blurred the lines for them. In this situation we are speaking about **moral or ethical temptation**. There is a right choice and a wrong one, and we are tempted to do what is wrong.

Our tougher choices consist of right against right (or a wrong against another wrong). We then find ourselves in the dilemmas of life where either choice sacrifices some very important and real value. It is not right against wrong. Rather, we find ourselves having to choose the lesser of two evils, or we find ourselves looking at two good things, but by choosing either one, we sacrifice some other important values. In this situation we are speaking about **ethical or moral dilemmas**. In this case we are conflicted, and even confused, because we face doing some harm or sacrificing some good, regardless of what we choose to do.

1. Truth versus Loyalty.

In the case of Enron, we can imagine the whistle-blower, Sherron Watkins, felt she faced some dilemmas. It is right to be loyal to your employer and to foster the well-being of the organization's employees. Yet, it is right to tell the truth. She knew that exposing these shady, off-book dealings had the potential to destroy the careers and reputations of highly respected businessmen. It could even cause very serious damage to the company's stockholders and employees. And it did just those things—people lost their pensions and their jobs in the fall of a great company. Telling the truth is a right thing to do. She had to balance company loyalty and the protection of pensions, reputations and jobs against telling the truth. She chose to tell the truth regardless of the consequences.

Bibhu was a professional working for an IT company in Bangalore. She found herself in a difficult time under challenging economic circumstances as workers were being laid off. Every few years as the business cycle slowed, top management slashed jobs at work, only to rehire when things started looking up again. When Bibhu and others saw top management meeting behind closed doors, they suspected the worse. Bibhu's boss, however, was a good friend and too ready to talk about secret things. So, Bibhu felt no hesitation in asking him about the future.

Her boss explained in some detail the contingency plan. If layoffs were necessary in this next quarter, Bibhu's team member Krishna would be slated to lose his job. He also made it very clear that this information was confidential and not to be shared.

Not long afterwards, Krishna approached Bibhu and asked her if the rumor he had heard might be true—that he would be the target of layoffs if business did not improve. This landed Bibhu in the truth vs. loyalty dilemma. Honesty and truth required an accurate answer, and she felt a strong loyalty to Krishna for all his good work. She also knew he needed the job because of his large family, including caring for a pair of orphaned nephews. However, she had given her word to keep the contingency plan confidential.

She faced the dilemma of two rights when she could not choose both.

2. Life versus another good (even another life).

What is the right thing to do when a family faces starvation without recourse? In Victor Hugo's novel, *Les Misérables*, Jean Valjean steals food because his family is starving, and he has no other options to feed them. For his crime he is relentlessly pursued. His dilemma is as follows: it is always wrong to let one's family starve, *and* it is always wrong to steal from others. Here the dilemma is between two wrongs, not two rights. It is the dilemma of life versus property rights.

Think About It

Answer Box # 2

What would you say to Jean Valjean? What would you advise him to do when his choice is between stealing or allowing his family to starve? Why?

A doctor who believes abortion is always morally wrong may nevertheless remove the uterus or fallopian tubes of a pregnant woman, knowing the procedure will cause the death of an embryo or fetus. This is done in cases in which the woman is certain to die without the procedure (examples include aggressive uterine cancer and ectopic² pregnancy). In these cases, the choice is between the life of the potential child and the mother or both lives. The surgery is intended to save the woman's life, not to terminate the pregnancy. However, it cannot be done without the effect of the child's death. If the surgery is not done, the likely greater evil is the death of both the mother and the unborn child. The dilemma is one life sacrificed to save another. Life against life.

Modern medicine, despite its prowess, is not perfect. What if a medicine will kill a few while saving many? Vaccine makers typically know that while a vaccine will save many lives, a few people may die from side effects of vaccination. The intent of creating the vaccine is to save those many lives. The fact that some people lose their lives is an undesired side effect. The bad effect, the deaths due to side effects, does not further any goals of the manufacturer. In this case, there is a very real good thing that is right that is pitted against an expected and predictable unintended bad thing that is wrong. The cost/benefit analysis is done to decide whether the risk of death to a few is worth the preservation of many more lives. How many lives sacrificed as a side effect is worth the intended effect of saving many others?

Ethics has sought to consider this particular sort of dilemma with what is known as the *doctrine or principle of "double effects."* Thomas Aquinas introduced this idea. It is the notion that an action, having foreseeable harmful effects that we are unable to practically separate from the intended good effects, may be ethically justifiable in certain circumstances. We aim to create the good effect, but in so doing, we know some bad effect will happen as well. In short, it is justifiable when our intention is to produce only the good effect, when the bad effect is not the means by which we produce the good effect and when the benefits of the good effect outweigh the harm that happens unintentionally.

3. Individual versus Community.

Pastor Prabhu³ was in charge of a two hundred-member, multi-ethnic church in South India. About half were Nadars, a high ranking caste. The rest were Parayas and Adi-dravida ("untouchables"). One of the wealthy Nadar families, Mr. and Mrs. Matilal, had three daughters and a son, Bashir. Bashir had completed a Masters degree but could not find a job. A good musician, he had served as choir director in the church. It was in that role that he met and fell in love with Amshula, the beautiful daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Rajah, Adi-dravidas. The Matilals noticed the budding romance and tried to end it, pointing out that the woman came from a poor, "untouchable" family. However, at the summer church camp, the couple decided to marry.

Pastor Prabhu said he would not marry them without parental consent, and the Matilals were not consenting. Therefore, one day the couple went to court and registered their marriage. When Bashir's parents heard this, they would not allow the couple into their home. The church was divided over the

² Ectopic means the fetus is developing outside the uterus and, if allowed to continue, will cause the death of the mother.

³ Based on a case study in Paul G. and Frances F. Hiebert, *Case Studies in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), pp. 177-178).

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matter. Many of the older members were against “love marriages” that were increasing in the cities and to the idea of “registered marriages.” Many of the younger people sided with the couple and noted that they were happy.

Conflict broke out when the couple showed up at church. Some elders demanded that the pastor send them away because they were sinners. The pastor refused to send anyone away. When communion was about to be held, the pastor invited all who were right with the Lord to come forward and take communion. That’s when the shouting began. Some older members demanded that the couple not be given communion, and some younger people threatened to leave the church if they were not served.

Think About It

Answer Box # 3

What do you think are the key ethical issues involved in this case? Do you side with the couple or with the parents of Bashir? Why?

4. Short-term versus long-term.

When Andre graduated from university with a degree in science, he found a good job in his profession, married and had four children. Thirteen years later he was working for an NGO that promised advancement into the higher managerial ranks. He was a devoted family man who loved his wife and her dedication to their children’s welfare. However, he also noticed how important it was for him to be present to give his affection, guidance and counsel, especially for his sons who were approaching a difficult transitional time in their teen years. Therefore, he made a commitment to spend plenty of time with them and to help them with their school homework.

However, he also loved his work that, at times, took him away from home for weeks. He was very good at his job. It became apparent that to advance rapidly up the managerial ranks he needed a Masters degree. A nearby university offered the degree in partnership with a Western agency that involved two weeks of residency work each year along with subsequent correspondence work. This would require three or three and a half years’ commitment and would consume the little free time he had for spending with his family, especially his children. Going for the degree would throw much of the family activity responsibilities back into his wife’s hands.

This pitted short-term against long-term goals. He felt he needed to honor his family’s short term needs, especially the need of his sons for his presence and guidance during a time when a father’s influence was critical. At the same time it was right to build toward the long-term needs of his family

5. Justice versus mercy.

Prisca worked as a feature editor in the Nation’s Standard Newspaper. She was in charge of a wide range of departments with features on education, books, science, politics, the arts, food and so on. What made the articles work was the skill of the writing. Therefore, she hired young staff members who were good writers, regardless of their other talents and interests.

She was delighted to hire Elizabeth, a graduate of the nation’s finest university. Elizabeth progressed rapidly to the point that, as assistant editor, she wrote regularly in the books and arts section. One summer day Prisca noticed she had submitted a story on a recently published, controversial book on the facts surrounding the movement for liberation from colonialism in the country. She was delighted to see it in the queue, ready for publication in a few days.

The next day Prisca found the book and arts editor standing silently in front of her desk. In one hand was Elizabeth’s review article submitted for publication. In the other was a copy of a review published in the London Times just three weeks ago. They were identical, word for word.

Prisca found herself feeling two conflicting desires. Half of her wanted to bolt from her desk and dash to the assistant editor’s desk. Didn’t she know plagiarism was wrong? Didn’t she know that nothing in journalism will destroy your career more quickly than plagiarism? That nothing defrauds readers more than plagiarism? That nothing is more difficult to detect than plagiarism? Prisca felt she should grab her by the neck, throw her out of the building and tell her never to come back.

However, Elizabeth also felt the desire to go over to Elizabeth's desk and quietly ask, "What on earth came over you? Why did you stoop to copying someone else's work? You know better than that. Let's have a cup of chai—you and I need to talk seriously."

Half of Prisca wanted justice; the other half mercy. What is the right thing to do? It is right to be merciful. It is right to do justice. But what is the right thing to do in this situation?

Think About It

Answer Box # 4

What would be your advice to Prisca? What should she do about Elizabeth? Is there anything else you would want to know before making a decision?

The question that hangs over all four of these instances is: what is the right thing to do? How do we think biblically, faithfully, intelligently and wisely about these sorts of situations? How do we determine a proper and wise course of action in order to do what is pleasing in God's eyes? Some of them present us with issues of wrong and greater wrong, others with differing amounts of the good in life that help it to flourish. All require prudence and wisdom, insight into what is happening and the considerations that might tip a decision in one direction as opposed to another. *This is what ethics is all about.*

Ethics: What is it?

Ethics concerns the moral dimension of life.⁴ It deals with matters of duty and moral principles—those decisions and actions that have to do with what is right and wrong. It is one important answer to the question: How should I live my life? This leads to further questions: what sort of person should I be? What standards or principles should guide my decisions and actions? What goals should I pursue? What am I obligated to do (or not do) by virtue of the positions I hold and roles in which I find myself?

Ethics is the study of the nature of morality. It examines issues of right and wrong, fairness and unfairness, good and bad, duty and obligation, justice and injustice. It has to do with the choices we make individually and even as an organization, community or nation. It assumes human agency and responsibility. It assumes we can make meaningful choices that shape our lives in terms of its ethical character.

This differs from *etiquette*. As with ethics, etiquette sometimes uses the language of right and wrong. However, etiquette has to do with *manners* not *morals*. It is concerned with the niceties of cultural patterns, of showing respect and of doing things in good social order. When a person does not behave with good manners, we are *offended*. When someone does not behave with good ethics, people are *harmed* (and often offended as well). Etiquette is concerned with right or wrong *manners*, not *morals*.

We are concerned with what is right because it fosters good morals, not because it displays good manners. We sense a clear difference between eating with poor manners at the table and killing people who are eating at the table. The difference has to do with good or bad manners (what is socially acceptable, such as using the right hand to eat food from the dish or not throwing food at other people at the table) and good or bad morals (what is ethically acceptable such as sharing food with the hungry no matter what we think of their manners or not stealing food).

This course is focused on applied ethics. It is not as concerned with all the long ethical debates and different theories of ethics, as with the challenge of learning to be ethical decision makers and actors in all areas of life. Nevertheless, we will need to know how people have tried to think carefully about right and wrong, so we will not ignore ethical theories though they will not be emphasized.

This is ethics for Christian leaders, ethics for decision-making, for living and leading. We want to learn how to think more clearly about the various challenges of life, challenges that face us with choices that must be decided on the basis of our fundamental ethical principles. We want to know more of the wisdom of God in dealing with complex and challenging situations that face us as Christians and as leaders.

To be sure, studying about ethics does not make a person ethical. It may increase knowledge without increasing virtue or wisdom. We are in pursuit not only of simply understanding how to reach well-founded, thoughtful ethical decisions, but also the character to carry out those decisions. We are

⁴ The term "ethics" comes from Greek *ethos* which meant "the accustomed place" or "custom, habit."

interested in strength of character. Moral principles and rules may guide us but only if we have a certain quality of character that enables us to enact them in real life. However, we do not want a person of strong character and wrong convictions. Being persistent and consistent in carrying out unwise and bad ethical choices is not a good thing. We've seen too many people of strong character whose ethical understanding is wrong. Strong character is only part of the ethical equation.

We are also seeking the knowledge and understanding that is able to discern the right things we should do. Most of our time will be spent on seeking that knowledge and understanding. We want to know, what are those principles, rules, laws, commands and guidelines that describe the good life, the life that is just and righteous, the life that consistently and skillfully does what is right in all sorts of situations?

It is essential to carry out those right actions in ways that respect the people and context within which they are carried out. A right action done in the wrong way can be as bad as the wrong action done in a right way. Both harm people and tear the social fabric. So the community of which we are a part is an integral element in thinking and living ethically. We need more than strength of character and knowledge of ethical principles or rules. We also need wisdom to put into action right conduct in our given context and community. Part of the disagreements and differences in ethical conduct concerns very different worldviews as well as cultural sensibilities about how to carry out ethical principles on which we may agree in the abstract.

So, while ethics is learning to *think* more clearly about what is involved in living lives of integrity and virtue, our goal in all of this is to *live* lives that adhere to what is good and right. That is learned only by experience—by the practice of facing ambiguous and complex situations, discovering the right thing to do and then actually doing it. Therefore, this course succeeds when you not only have better knowledge of the ethical path to take, but also when you live a better life.

For Christians, this whole arena is part of reflecting on the implications for life and decisions that flow from becoming a follower of Jesus Christ. As disciples we are not in search of some general notion of what is good and right, but what our obedience to the will of God looks like in our given context. Our point of departure is not a quest to define and delineate what is good and right. It is reflection seeking to answer the question: what must I do as a believer in Jesus and member of the body of Christ? What is the will of God for me and for the communities to which I belong?

Thus, Christian ethics is oriented to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. That is its defining characteristic. Christian ethics has much to learn from other sorts of ethical reflection and wisdom. However, its starting point and criterion for ethics is the revelation of God. It is rooted in an understanding of the Bible and shaped by the context and cultures in which Christians and the Church operate.

Key Traditions in Ethical Reasoning

Cultural Traditions

Ethics is rooted in traditions. The most important traditions are the larger civilizational and cultural traditions that surround us. We live in a multi-cultural world: Indian, Chinese, African, European, Latin American—and subcultures within them. Each cultural tradition has its own ways of approaching life and setting priorities. This is true even of the cultural traditions that we find in the Bible. The word of God comes to us incarnated in cultural traditions and practices that are sometimes similar to our own and sometimes very strange and distant. Everything we encounter in the Bible is incarnated in the cultural experience of its human authors and developed against the background of a cultural worldview different from our own.

This is not to say that the Bible is irrelevant. There is overlap between the cultures of the Bible and the cultures of the readers of the Bible in all ages, but there are also sharp differences. Understanding the meanings of the Bible means understanding its texts within their cultural and historical context. This is not to say that ethics is relativistic, bound completely by the culture within which it is developed. Often we can distinguish the cultural form of an ethical imperative from its moral or ethical intention. Think about the following example.

The prohibition of boiling a young goat in the milk of its mother (Ex 23:19) indicates the strangeness of some of the commands or laws of the Bible. Why is there this prohibition? How did this command fit into the social and cultural practices and values of Israel? Why this command? It does not seem to be dealing with some deep, broadly general ethical principle.

For that reason we may think this command irrelevant. So why take the time to try to understand it? The command is given for people who lived in an agricultural culture approximately three thousand years ago. In many of our present day cultures, we do not boil young goats in anything, much less in the mother's milk. Of course, some of us come from cultures where barbecuing a goat is an event, but not boiling it.

We must ask of biblical materials: why was this command, rule, guideline or example given? What motivated this particular instance of an imperative to shape the life of Israel or the Church?

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The first thing we can say is that it was not a matter of animal cruelty, taking aim at telling Israelites not to kill young goats. Archaeological discoveries suggest an answer. This way of treating a young goat was part of a fertility rite of the Canaanites. The prohibition, in its context, was forbidding Israelites from taking part in syncretistic⁵ religious rituals that combined the faith of Israel with the religion of the Canaanites. If this is so, then the command has some relevance to our own situation.

While the form of the command is relative (it is about goats) and the specifics seem irrelevant (many of us may never boil a goat much less kill one), the intent of the command (to forbid religious syncretism) is not. Even today we find ourselves in a multi-religious world. We struggle to know when tolerance and acceptance of other faith traditions leads us into syncretism.

To say all this is simply to recognize that ethics in the Bible (and elsewhere) is *contextual*. We cannot understand the ethics of the Bible apart from the conditions and context within which the ethical materials (such as laws) were created. The reason for the ethical materials and how they functioned within their social and cultural world must be understood before we seek to spell out what relevance or significance they may have for our day and our world. The social and cultural context of laws, rules, customs and habits makes a great deal of difference when we decide what is right or wrong.

Think About It

Answer Box # 5

Can you think of an example from your context where different cultural traditions come up with very different ideas of what is ethical or moral and what is not? Please write it here:

Ethical Traditions of Reasoning

More formally, there are philosophical traditions that have developed as ways of clarifying cultural traditions. While cultures may offer conflicting advice, philosophical traditions seek to bring clarity, consistency and cogency in ethical decision making. Even when we examine Christian traditions (Catholic, Wesleyan, Calvinist, Pentecostal, Anabaptist, Lutheran, Baptist, Adventist, etc.), we discover that these philosophical traditions are employed as means to develop well-rounded Christian ethics.

Indeed, when we look carefully at the ethical material in Scripture, we find these various patterns of reasoning. Some of the biblical material is based on rules or commands; other stresses the motive or character of the ethical actor; other scriptures bring the role of the actor into focus as important in deciding what is right; some material even considers the results of the action in evaluating its ethical significance. We can see that the patterns of reasoning and critical thinking in philosophical ethics have their parallels in various scriptural patterns of reasoning.

In deciding what is right or good, each of these traditions focuses on certain criteria as more important than other aspects of human conduct. When we look at Christian thought about ethics, some people appeal to divine revelation only (the divine command in the moment). Others may start there but then also look to things such as the consequences of action (consequentialism or utilitarianism), the rules that guide action (deontological ethics), the intention or motive with which action is carried out (intentionalism), the character of the person carrying out the action (perfectionism or virtue ethics) or the duties inherent in and required by the formal role a person is playing in a social structure (obligationism).

In this section we want to look at these patterns of ethical reasoning. Often our sense of ethical or moral dilemma comes from the fact that our situation can be understood in several different ways. Some issues can be evaluated differently, depending upon what is perceived as the most important criteria for determining the right thing to do. We can see a clear rule or principle involved that says to do this or that—at the same time it is very clear that, if we do that, it can result in great harm for other people. So, which do we choose? Do we follow the rule and harm a lot of people or break the rule and protect a lot of people from harm? Are the rules more important than the consequences of the action? Different approaches to determining the ethical decision provide answers to questions such as these in a variety of ways.

⁵ Syncretism is defined as “the amalgamation or attempted amalgamation of different religions, cultures or schools of thought.” (http://oxforddictionaries.com/view/entry/m_en_us1296531#m_en_us1296531, Accessed December 17, 2010)

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We will categorize these approaches into five ways of looking at and evaluating action. They often conflict with each other because they prioritize one aspect of action rather than another. These approaches emphasize as most relevant for ethical evaluation very different aspects of conduct and point in different directions as to what good or right conduct might be. In addition, we all know that people of good will, acting with the best intentions, can create great harm. Their motives were good, but the effects of their decision or action created significant damage. At the same time, we can also think of the opposite. People acting from bad motives wind up creating very positive consequences (without intending to do so). Liars (character) can tell the truth (hence engaging in conduct that conforms to a widely shared rule). So, how might we consider human conduct and say of particular actions, "that was the right thing to do?" Let's look at five ethical reasoning traditions that try to help us decide the right thing to do:

1. Deontological⁶ or rule-based ethics:

This focuses on the regulative **principles**, rules, commands or laws that establish the basic ground rules of how we are to live human life together. Christians find this tradition in the strength of the Ten Commandments ("You shall not murder;" "You shall not commit adultery;" "You shall not give false testimony;" etc.) and the importance of the Sermon on the Mount ("Let your light shine before others;" "Settle matters quickly with your adversary;" "Do not swear an oath at all;" etc.). These words are in command mode. They impose a duty or obligation upon a person. The central terms are right and wrong.

Here an action is considered right if and when it conforms to some rule such as an enacted law, a divine command or a moral principle. Deontological views challenge us to discover the absolute basics that undergird human life as *human*, the necessary prerequisites without which human community is impossible and the limits which, when transgressed, destroy community and personal integrity. We are told to follow the rules, keep the commands and observe the laws that are inherent to living a good, harmonious life within community. This is your duty.

The Bible has many imperatives, rules and commands. Many Christians think being ethical means following the Ten Commandments or the imperatives of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount. This approach suggests that we need to discover *God's rules* for living the good life and follow them as closely and consistently as we can. God tells us what is right and wrong in the Bible by giving us principles, commands and imperatives:

He has shown all you people what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8)

2. Consequential⁷ or ends-based ethics:

This emphasizes the **results** or outcome of an action. The consequences of an action tell us whether it was the right thing to do. Sometimes following a rule or law leads to very bad results. Ordinarily, the rule is that we are to preserve the life of another human being. However, sometimes we sacrifice one life to preserve another (as when the police or a citizen intervenes and kills an assailant who is shooting other people). In this approach, action is assessed in terms of its relative good or bad for human well-being (or the well-being of the environment or some other such value). One might think of the story of Rahab, the inn-keeper in Joshua 2 and her commendation in Hebrews 11:31. Her lie violated the mandate to be a truth-teller, but the effects of the lie preserved the lives of the spies and furthered the progress of God's plan for God's people. The central terms are good and bad.

We are challenged to calculate the likely results that flow from following a given rule, decision or action path, and we are told that such anticipations of likely outcomes should shape our decision. A rule may tell us to be truth-tellers. But what happens when telling the truth results in the deaths of a number of innocent people at the hands of bad people? Are rules only good when and so long as they guide us in action that leads to positive results? When they don't, are there exceptions to the rules or a higher rule that tells us to break the one that will lead to harm? If a rule is a good rule only when it leads to positive outcomes, then *the rule is justified by its outcomes*.

The consequentialist would argue that rules or principles are no more than summaries of validated human experience. We have found that, on average, following these rules leads to the greatest good. However, sometimes the rules no longer fit the situation and then we see that we have been seeking the best results from our behavior all along. To be sure, this way of arguing for the rightness of given action can become cynical. As a practical matter, many want to do what is right but care even more that things turn out as well as possible. As Machiavelli puts it in *The Prince*, "In all men's acts, and in

⁶ Deontological is based on the Greek *deon*, which means "obligation" or "duty," and *logia* which means "words" or "to speak about." See Appendix A of this unit for different ways that rules or principles are related to each other in seeking what is right to do.

⁷ This is also called teleological ethics. This comes from *telos*, the Greek word for "end" or "issue." It is the end result or outcome that justifies the action.

those of princes most especially, it is the result that renders the verdict when there is no court of appeal.”⁸

The Bible provides us with a prudential approach to life in the Wisdom literature. It urges us to be wise in our conduct and to take into account the results of various choices of action. The advice the elder gives to the young man is not argued on the basis that sexual immorality violates the command of God. Rather he makes a consequentialist argument (Proverbs 7:24-27):

Now then, my son, listen to me; pay attention to what I say. Do not let your heart turn to her ways or stray into her paths. Many are the victims she has brought down; her slain are a mighty throng. Her house is a highway to the grave, leading down to the chambers of death.

3. Intentional or motive-based ethics:

This pattern of reasoning wants to go deeper than the action or its results. The focus is on the **intention** or motive that forms and energizes a person's action. What motivates a decision or action? This approach says that this is what determines whether or not the action is right. An action is right not because it conforms to some rule or command or produces good results, but only when the agent who is acting acts from the right motivations. The central term for this tradition is intention.

I can do a “loving” action and yet be indifferent or even spiteful toward the one who benefits. A loving *act* needs to be accompanied by a loving *heart* for it to be a full-fledged, loving action. We can do the right things from the wrong motives. Does such an action then count as an *ethical* action? Or is it only partially ethical? The right action has been made, but the actor was not right in the action. Does not Jesus reach into our inner spirit and motives and insist that what goes on within our minds and emotions count? It is not just having sexual intercourse outside marriage that counts as wrong conduct. Lust in our heart can violate God's will for our lives (Matthew 5:27-28). Bad conduct is not simply a matter of ignorance of good rules for living. It is a matter of the heart, of the inner motivations and perspective. If you want good ethical conduct, you need a change that reaches all the way to the heart.

The Bible constantly underlines the importance of the heart, the inner life, as the root of action:

Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what defile you; but eating with unwashed hands does not defile you. (Matthew 15:19-20)

I will put my law in their minds and write it on their heart. (Jeremiah 31:33)

In Paul's household code of conduct, slaves are told the following as the path of righteous conduct: obedience is the command. However, it must be done in a certain spirit, a given attitude of respect and sincerity, and not simply because it might have a good consequence (“win their favor”), though that is not condemned:

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. (Eph. 6:5-6)

4. Perfectionist or character ethics:⁹

This next approach says we need to recognize that emotions and motives are short-lived. It is not just that my right action is carried out with the right motive. Even more basic is the **character** or settled habits, the disposition and maturity of a person. Something more than the outward act and the inner spirit is involved. Personhood is God's basic concern—what sort of person am I right now, and who am I becoming? The central term for this pattern of reasoning is virtues.

An action is right when it issues from the settled habits and character of the actor. A liar can tell the truth, even with good motives, but it is contrary to his or her character. Ethics is about established virtues that center on the excellencies that are appropriate to our potentialities as human beings created in the image of God. In this approach the emphasis moves beyond the isolated act, its results and its motive. It is “perfecting” the character, bringing to full maturity the capacities that lie within us.

We might think of the person who is deceptive and regularly tells lies. His character is weak because he has not developed the habit of truth-telling. When a “liar” tells the truth, does that count as virtuous? What if I just happen to do what is right, not consciously or intentionally, not rooted in some character trait—does that count as ethical? Or is it just an ethical “accident”?

Is the goal of ethics a well formed character that tells the truth because truth-telling is a regular, deeply rooted habit of the person? Must I have the “virtue” of some ethical good to be fully ethical? Am I only fully ethical when I can do what is right repeatedly, regularly, skillfully with ease and pleasure? Are wisdom and maturity the crown of ethics? Do we need not just the knowledge of rules and good results from an action but also the maturity and character strength to see when our rules no longer apply, when we need to create some new rules and ways of handling life as it changes?

⁸ Daniel Donno translation, Bantam Books, 1981, p.63

⁹ This is frequently called “virtue” ethics.

This is also a basic theme in the Bible. We are to grow in grace and faith, to come to maturity, to the fullness of the stature of Jesus Christ as we are conformed to his image. In the Old and New Testament, wisdom points at the perfecting or maturing of our personhood. Protestant ethics has been nervous about this approach, unlike Catholic ethics. It fears that "virtue ethics" can too often fall into "works righteousness" and the exalting of fallen and fallible humans into "sainthood" as a special category.

However, we must acknowledge the biblical element that underscores the development of abilities, settled skills and inclinations to do what is right and loving as well as disinclinations and inner resistance to do what is wrong. Character is built when, over time and with repeated practice (like an athlete), I gain strength and ability to discern what is right in given situations and have the inner power to do it even against great opposition. Learning and training over time are essential to becoming an ethical person. They are part of the process of sanctification. I grow from being an immature person who is able to know and do what infants can do to a mature person who is able to do what only the fully grown and wise can do:

It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should *learn* to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God... (1 Thess. 4:3-5)

In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, still being an infant, is not acquainted with the teachings about righteousness. But solid food is for the *mature*, who by constant use have *trained* themselves to distinguish good from evil. (Hebrews 5:12-14) (Italics added for emphasis.)

5. **Obligationist or role-based ethics:**¹⁰

This pattern of reasoning focuses on the duties inherent in a position within a society/organization as determined by the current family, civil society and state systems. In many ways this is a variation of deontological or rule-based ethics. However, in this ethic the rules do not come from some generalized scheme or broad command of God. The rules come from the obligations or "commands" built into the social roles we play and the relationships those roles create. These first four traditions have emphases that are somewhat abstract and distant from real life. This approach wants to count as ethical, not disembodied principles, but embodied actions, carried out by people who are embedded in social networks and relationships. The central term is role.

We know this about sexuality. If I am male or female, I am capable of sexual activity. My social role or position determines whether sexual activity is right or wrong. Am I married to the person with whom I am having sex? If I am a guard in a prison, I am authorized by my position to keep prisoners locked up, but in my role as a husband, I have no right to lock up my children or a neighbor I dislike. As a policeman, I am commissioned to protect the citizenry from evil persons who might prey on them. I can even use deadly force and kill someone in my role as a policeman. As a father or mother, I must bring up my children well, caring for them and teaching them the ways of the Lord. It is not a responsibility I can delegate. It is the social role I am playing that determines right and wrong.

This approach says that the social roles we play, the positions we hold within a social setting, are the critical considerations for most actions. They determine the rightness and validity of an action. Action is always rooted in a social world where people occupy different positions and have different role obligations and responsibilities. The policeman is obliged to hinder the evil doer and can use deadly force to do so, whereas the casual bystander has no such obligation. Sex can be shared by a loving, committed, passionate couple, but only those who are married do so properly. The state can wage war, but my neighborhood association cannot.

The ethical question becomes: what is the role I am enacting as I perform the action I am about to do? As the CEO of a large corporation, what actions am I obliged to perform in order to foster the interests of stockholders, the employees, the environment and customers? What are my responsibilities? What do I do when my obligation in such a position seems to conflict with more basic obligations as a human being? Every ethical action is tied to some social role we have been given (by birth) or acquired (by choice or

¹⁰ This approach does not have a commonly used name because many ethical writers ignore it. But, as we will see, it is fundamental to questions that face people who are living and working inside organizations. It is a form of deontological or rule-based ethics. However, now the rules are tightly tied to a given social role or position in a community or organization. That position or role demands certain behaviors that would be unethical if one did not hold that position. Those roles are part of a larger whole: a society/nation-state that structures a whole network of laws, institutions, customs and social formations from the family to the organizations of civil society by means of the dominant authority, the State. What is "ethical" depends upon the role you are playing and what that role demands from you as the occupier of that particular position.

fortune). What is ethical for me as a husband is not proper as a friend; what I must do as a soldier, I cannot do as a mere civilian.

In the Bible, some ethical materials are directed at specific roles in terms of what is right for them to do. Insofar as the governing authorities are servants of God, their role responsibilities, what they are to do, is spelled out in many places. Consider the following:

They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. (Romans 13:4)

A wise king winnows out the wicked; he drives the threshing wheel over them. (Proverbs 20:26)

When one rules over people in righteousness, when he rules in the fear of God, he is like the light of morning at sunrise on a cloudless morning, like the brightness after rain that brings grass from the earth. (2 Samuel 23:3-4).

Ezekiel's words about the princes of Judah, the prophets and the priests mark out special duties that attend to people who hold those positions. Here the duties are presented negatively, in words that indicate people in these positions are doing the opposite of what God (and their social role) expects of them. Their guilt is greater because the impact of the prominent position they hold is wide and deep¹¹:

There is a conspiracy of her princes within her [Jerusalem] like a roaring lion tearing its prey; they devour people, take treasures and precious things and make many widows within her. Her priests do violence to my law and profane my holy things...Her officials within her are like wolves tearing their prey, they shed blood and kill people to make unjust gain. Her prophets whitewash these deeds for them by false visions and lying divinations...The people of the land practice extortion and commit robbery; they oppress the poor and needy and mistreat the foreigner, denying them justice. (Ezekiel 22:25-29)

Summary

We have created a quick picture of these five traditions. They are not equal in importance or relevance to settling issues of right and wrong in ethics or in Christian thinking. Ethics is most clearly concerned with *conduct*, with what and how people and organizations engage in action. Christian faith is also concerned deeply with conduct (consider its tendency to focus on laws and principles of conduct). However, it is even more deeply concerned with the inner character of the actor because action (and words) come out of the heart.

The chart to the right highlights the five traditions and adds "conduct" to them as their common subject matter. We have provided each term with a range of synonyms for its main concerns. All are concerned to discern correct action from an ethical point of view.

Principles	Codes, Principles, Prescription, Commands, Directives, Dictate, Policies, Laws, Statutes, Standard
Roles	Position, Station, Profession, Office, Job
Intentions	Motives, Feelings, Attitude, Purpose, Spirit
Conduct	Action, Behavior, Performance
Character	Heart, Makeup, Essence, Nature, Habits
Effects	Consequences, Results, Outcomes

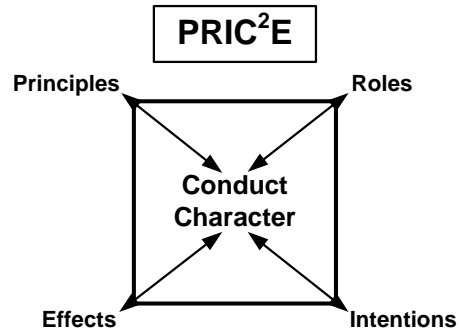
Each underlines an important consideration. However, clear and deep ethical decision making takes all five of them into account in assessing given decisions and actions.

We've tried to capture this in a graphic picture to stress the reality that these are interrelated and have impact on each other. They are not separated in the real world or in our actual character. Therefore, there are arrows with heads at each end that indicate that reality. We've put conduct and character in the center to emphasize their centrality in ethical living and leading. We hope this model's name (Pric²e) will enable you to remember all of these five traditions and the final importance of character.

¹¹ Some argue that all sins are equal in that all are equally fatal spiritually. This is true. Whether you ingest and die from a gram of poison or a kilogram of poison makes little difference. Either way you are dead as a result. However, what this misleadingly suggests is that the *guilt* of all sins is also equal. That is clearly not the case. The judgment of God is proportional to the knowledge of the person as well as to the responsibility of the person. The ramifications of David's sins of adultery and killing of Uriah were felt throughout all Israel. His position magnified the effects of his sin. In that sense, because he was the anointed, chosen of God, his guilt was the greater because he sinned against greater light. His sin caused greater damage to the moral fabric of Israel than had he been simply a lowly, unknown shepherd who did something similar. We all sense this when the person who falls morally is a pastor or priest. The tragedy is greater because this is not simply a nominal churchgoer but a leader of the people of God. Such a person should, by reason of spiritual maturity and scriptural training, be a positive role model. It may be the same sin, but it does not have the same results or responsibility. *Equally sinful but not equally guilty.*

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This ends our quick sketch of five ways of reasoning in ethics. We will encounter these ways of thinking repeatedly. Knowing that these are patterns used to discern the right thing to do, we will begin to be able to see them in use. We will be able to use them well as we seek to analyze and understand complex situations. We will also begin to see why good, intelligent Christians who are knowledgeable may come to different conclusions about concerning right thing to do. If we put different emphasis or priority on rules, results, motives, character or roles, we will come to somewhat different conclusions as to what constitutes the best and right conduct.



Think About It

Answer Box # 6

In thinking about these five traditions in Christian ethical thought, which one do you think is most prominent and influential in your church tradition? How do people *mainly* decide what is right to do in your Christian community?

You may feel a bit overwhelmed by these five approaches to sorting issues of right and wrong. However, you will discover that each of them provides a way to understand why we are often confused and uncertain in complex situations. We can see that each of these has some truth to it and provides some help as we try to learn to be wise and faithful in how we live our lives. We will explore each of them in different applied settings. You will become more self-aware of how you use each of these approaches when figuring out what you consider to be the right thing to do.

Think About It

Answer Box # 7

1. Do you believe that God wants you to engage in some concentrated thought, discussion and decision making with regard to moral issues that affect your life and that of your colleagues? Explain.
2. As you think about your life and work, write down two or three moral issues that are of concern to you at this time.

Note: Are you marking new insights (!) as well as questionable ideas (?) to which you can go back later for further analysis?

Unit 1 Final Assignment

Final Assignment

1. Write on one to two pages your expectations from this course. What is it you hope to learn from focusing on Christian ethics? What are the goals you hope to accomplish as a result of this study?
2. On another one to two pages, write about the aspects of your life and work that you see as special challenges to your desire to live and lead others ethically. What are the major challenges? How do you hope to meet these challenges?
3. Please confirm that you have discussed the results of your interactive work in Unit 1 ("Think About It" boxes) with a group of two other people. (See "Note on Process" on page v in the "Expectations for the Course" section of the Introduction to the Course.)
4. Given what you have read in the assigned readings (including Stott, 23-47), why should we be involved or engaged in our larger world? Why do we as followers of Christ care about the ethical and moral fabric of our society and community? What motivates us to care about the ethical quality of the marketplace, politics, the village and city, our extended family? Should we be primarily concerned about the Christian community? In thinking about your own Christian community, does it tend to fall closer to the "escape" or the "engagement" side of Stott's picture? Why?

When your work is complete (three to five pages total), send a copy to your facilitator via email as an attachment. Please send it by the date indicated in the Module Calendar.

Appendix A: Rules and Rule-Keeping as a Starting Point

Human cultures are organized by a fabric of rules, some formal, written and enforced by a large apparatus of military, police and judicial courts. Other rules are informal, unwritten and often not enforced. The belief that rules are essential for human survival has a very long history. Even in the modern scene it is clear that even animals, while not making laws or proclaiming edicts to regulate behavior, act according to what seem to be innately given rules of behavior. By those "rules of behavior" they are able to regulate aggression, mating, food gathering, child-rearing and social dominance.

Humans differ in that their symbolic capability of fully developed language enables them to make rules and specify values that extend, contradict or intensify tendencies that already exist in human interaction. These rules help to establish alliances, foster sharing and encourage various sorts of social solidarity and cooperation that enhance the human ability to create and develop immense cultural worlds.

Listen to the sociologist Jack Douglas as he talks about rules:

Shared rules are the most crucial meanings involved in constructing social order. Throughout human experience thus far, shared rules have proven to be a necessary ingredient in constructing any social order that was not merely transitory. Only shared rules, which are essentially prescriptions and proscriptions of typical actions in typical everyday situations supported by various internal commitments and external sanctions, have proven capable thus far of producing the degree or ordering of interaction which human beings have found necessary for existence and for the good life.¹²

Yet it is also clear that regardless of how many rules societies may create and confer upon their members, there are different types of rules. Some of the rules are enforced as without exception. These rules must be observed always and by all persons, period. Other rules admit of exceptions. They are flexible. These rules might not be observed depending upon something else, such as whether one is sick or healthy, male or female, young or aged, free or coerced, the powerful leader or a weak follower. In other words, not only do we find rules in social groups, but we also seem to have rules for breaking at least some of those first set of rules.

Were we to have more time, we might spend it very profitably trying to understand this rule-making, rule-keeping and rule-breaking conduct of humans in a variety of socio-cultural groups. It is clear that some groups have a very dense and detailed thicket of rules, spelling out in great detail the right thing

¹²*Deviance and Respectability: The Social Construction of Moral Meanings* (Basic Books, 1970) p. vii.

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to do for most of their members in most of their situations and relationships. Traditional Japan is a case in point.

Other socio-cultural groups have considered rules to be necessary only in the most general of terms so that each individual in each unique constellation of situations and relationships can “tailor-make” the conduct to suit the issues, the people and goods at stake. In such societies, freedom is a higher value than security and clarity of duty. The Greek Stoic philosopher, Epictetus, embraced this view: “What is it that every man seeks? To be secure, to be happy, to do what he pleases without restraint and without compulsion.”¹³ Contemporary North American society has gone through a time that mixes the two, with desires for codified, legally binding rules for public arenas and nearly no rules for the private.

We begin with rules because they are the clearest, though not the only, element of our social life that is moral and ethical in nature. When we take a closer look at rules of all sorts, we want to ask a number of questions:

1. If rules are vital to the pursuit of human security and happiness, what sorts of rules foster those goods?
2. Why are there rules allowing exceptions to some of those rules that foster human well-being? Should there be exceptions or do exceptions reveal the unfinished ethical or social business in constructing an order that is genuinely good for humans?
3. Are rules about exceptions to rules essential if people are to live with one another? If so, why are there some rules in every social group for which there appear to be no exceptions?
4. Finally, what is the ontological¹⁴ or axiological status of the rules we find in social orders? Can we say some of those rules are bad rules as measured by some universal set of rules? Or are all rules simply the short hand of given cultures that express preferences, tastes, likes and dislikes, but tell us nothing about a more basic moral structure of the universe? Are there any rules that ought to be found in all human societies, in all times, because they correspond to some objective human good or some objectively given standard of good and evil?

Let me illustrate the range of alternatives we can find in answer to the following question: is it ever right to lie in order to save a life? Is there a justifiable rule that specifies an exception to the rule to tell the truth and nothing but the truth?

Case Study: *Some years ago the spy ship Pueblo was captured in international waters by North Korea who claimed the ship was in their territorial waters. The US Commander, Lloyd Bucher, and a crew of 23 were taken prisoner. Under the threat of death for his crewmen, Commander Bucher signed confessions. He lied by admitting to the guilt of spying in North Korean territorial waters. The net result was the releasing of all captives. Was he right in lying in order to facilitate the sparing of the lives of his crewman? Is it ever right to lie?*¹⁵

There are a number of ways that this question (and others like it in ethics) may be answered. Various ethical thinkers have come to quite different conclusions as to the nature and status of ethical rules or norms:

1. **There are no ethical norms.** Lying is neither right nor wrong because the categories of right and wrong are nonsense. We cannot say what we mean when we say something is “right” or “wrong.” There are no objective moral standards, no overall objective standpoint from which to say something is good or bad. From the standpoint of the crew and the USA the lie was “good,” for it preserved life and brought about release, things valued by the United States. Insofar as it was known that the confession was a lie, it would be “bad” for North Korea because it would discredit them in the international court of appeal. Ethical judgments are not about actual matters of right and wrong. They are strategic and rhetorical devices in communication networks meant to influence how people feel or act. To say something is good is to ask others to feel the same way about it as I do. It is not a statement about some objective state of affairs.
2. **There are no universal norms.** Lying is generally wrong. However, in this case the lie was an expedient measure preserving life. Life is a greater value than the telling of a truth. As a rule, lying is

¹³ The Discourses of Epictetus, from The Works of Epictetus, Trans. Thomas W. Higginson (Boston: Little Brown, 1865) p. 296.

¹⁴ Ontological references the branch of metaphysics that deals with the nature of being. (http://oxforddictionaries.com/view/entry/m_en_us1273475#m_en_us1273475.005, Accessed December 17, 2010.)

¹⁵This example is found in Normal Geisler, *Ethics: Alternatives and Issues* (Zondervan, 1971), pp. 13-20).

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wrong, but there are times when rules need to be broken. In this case (if we are utilitarian and concerned with alternative consequences of conduct), we would say it is good or right to lie in order to preserve life.

3. **There is one universal norm.** Lying is sometimes right. Because there is only one absolute rule, lying on its behalf may, in some situations, be the right thing to do. Situations and contexts are so radically different that there is only one norm capable of applying to them all (for example, the norm might be to do the loving thing; in this case it was an act of love to sacrifice truth and integrity out of concern for the lives of close comrades). Of course it was the right thing to do, but only if it was done selflessly and out of concern for the lives of others. If Commander Bucher did it to save his own skin, then it was not a loving lie, but a selfish lie and thereby not necessarily a good action.
4. **There are many non-conflicting norms.** Lying is always wrong. Preserving the truth is always right. There are always alternatives to lying. Bucher might have remained silent. He might have confessed to spying but not to doing it in North Korean waters (which was the truth). We will never know what the North Koreans would have done if faced with the truth rather than the lie. While killing is wrong (and lying is wrong), telling the truth that leads to someone else killing on the basis of that truth is not wrong. Bucher should not have considered the consequences of his action. He was not faced with the issue "Shall I kill or shall I lie." Those alternatives were not his. His alternatives were "Shall I lie or shall I tell the truth with the possibility that the North Koreans will kill in response."
5. **There are many conflicting norms.** Lying is never right. It is always wrong to lie and it is always wrong to kill. Sometimes, in this fallen world, we face the dilemma of a lie or a killing. Then we must choose the lesser of two evils, but they remain evils that must be confessed. In this case, the lesser evil was sacrificing truth instead of sacrificing life. Nonetheless, Bucher needed to confess his sin of falsehood afterwards. He sinned, though he was pardonable for the sin because it was unavoidable. His dilemma was created by the greater sin of the North Koreans. Ideally, if no one broke universal norms, there would be no dilemmas. However, because the North Koreans had already broken a number of norms, Bucher was, unfortunately, eventually faced with a choice of two evils.
6. **There are higher and lower norms.** Lying is sometimes right. There are a number of universal norms, but they sometimes conflict in a fallen world. When two universal norms come into conflict, we must obey the higher universal norm rather than the lower. In obeying the norm to preserve life, Bucher chose to obey the higher norm and did the right thing. He was not doing what was the lesser of two evils. He was doing what was the right thing to do in the context. He did not intend the lie. His intention was to save life, not to sacrifice truth. That the means to save life in this situation was through the means of lying is incidental to the moral evaluation of what happened. Lying as such is wrong, but lying as transcended by the imperative to save life is not wrong. It is justifiable to falsify for the sake of preserving life. In this sense there are no exceptions but only exemptions from lower norms. There are no exceptions to the law of gravity, and the plane at 37,000 feet above sea level traveling at 570 miles an hour is not an exception to gravity. However, it is obeying physical "laws" that are universal themselves and, for a time, exempt it from gravity's confinement of heavier than air objects to the earth.

As we study Christian ethics, we will be confronted with a number of issues and perspectives. We need to be charitable and clear as we dialogue with other Christians (and other cultures) when we seek to understand the mind and will of Christ for how we are to live our lives in a confusing and fallen world.

Think About It

Answer Box # 8

In looking at these six ways of understanding rules or ethical principles, which do you find most persuasive from a Christian perspective? What would you have told Bucher to do? Is it ever right to lie? Why?

Ethics for Living and Leading

Unit 2

How Do Leaders Become Ethically Fit?



Development Associates International

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Unit 2 – How Do Leaders Become Ethically Fit? (By the long process of discipleship, learning by doing)

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Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this unit you will be able to:

- State what ethical fitness looks like and begin to assess your own ethical fitness
- Elucidate a number of the key characterizing marks of the ethically fit leader
- Explain the important steps the Leader and the Organization must take to become ethically fit

Steps to Complete Unit 2

Read and Respond

Readings are included at the end of most units. These texts provide biblical and cultural framework for an adequate understanding of Christian ethics. Please reflect and respond as indicated in assignments found within the texts.

Supplementary text: For Unit 2 read Stott, pp. 485-499 “A Call for Christian Leadership”

Note: Complete the final email assignment for Unit 2.

Lecture Notes & Workbook

Overview

Unit 1 reviewed the basics of ethics. *We now begin with you!* This is a course to aid leaders in living and leading ethically. We seek ethical “fitness” in Christian leaders. This is our goal—that you become ethically fit. Ethical fitness is like physical fitness. We are not born with it. It is something that we develop. We reach fitness only by a slow process that occurs day by day over many years. Sometimes the effort in seeking it is unconscious. Sometimes we find ourselves in a deliberate training program, even with a coach or mentor. It does not come by osmosis. We have to deliberately, intentionally seek it.

It is also not a matter of simply coming from the most ethical, high-minded, right-thinking Christian family in the world. Your parents and family may be wonderful examples. You may be well-schooled and well-churched. These blessings make it so much easier to be ethical yourself. You may have had ethics courses as an undergraduate before this course—perhaps even ethics training on the job. You may work in an organization that cares about and encourages ethical behavior. All of this is wonderful preparation, but none of it necessarily means *you* are ethically fit.

Fitness involves engagement, mental effort, and the courage to try different things in confronting difficult ethical situations. This involves reading books, conversing with others, seeking out and learning from good examples and finding good mentors who have more years of experience than we do. We don’t get ethically fit by simply reading case studies and thinking about ethical paradigms and dilemmas any more than we get physically fit by watching a lot of sports. We must allow ourselves the challenge of facing difficult ethical situations and learning how to discern what is at stake and then make decisions that we put into action. This does not mean we will get everything right, as though we have a “handbook to Christian ethics” with all the answers in it. In fact we will make mistakes—and the wise will learn from them. We have also got to care and to be committed to getting things right, or this process will not work in us.

However, once we are ethically “fit,” we will discover (as is the case with other sorts of “fitness”) that we are now able to do easily and with some pleasure what used to require much effort and agony. It becomes “second nature” to respond with ethically good attitudes and actions. We find ourselves with some ethical “intuition;” we are able to read situations and people more quickly, accurately and adequately.

Reaching fitness isn’t enough. Once we are there, we must maintain it. We never come to a point where we don’t have more we need to learn about human conduct, organizational life and character. Fitness is as much about character as it is about conduct. It is developing the inner strengths or capabilities so that, when ethical choices face you, you:

- Understand what’s at stake;
- Discern the possible solutions;
- See the likely impact of each solution;
- Understand what values/principles are relevant and helpful;
- Act decisively and rightly, even when it may be personally costly.

Ethical fitness is about a basic readiness and capacity to act appropriately in many situations. It is an inclination, already present inside one’s character, to do what is right in all affairs of life.

In biology we talk about the survival of the “fittest” as a mechanism by which life forms move through history. Ethical fitness is like that as well. There is an adaptation in which the demands of the kingdom of God have shaped our inner character so that it is ethically adaptable and capable of seeing what is right and wise in implementing action in many human contexts, cultures and situations. The end of the story for those who are ethically fit is that, when they have faced challenging issues, they did what was right with integrity, despite the cost.

We can also speak of the ethical fitness of organizations. Leaders recognize that their organizations can and do face demands that can compromise the integrity of organizational life. If the leaders have prepared by developing a clear ethical climate, core values and codes of conduct; by modeling the commitment to those values and principles; and by training the staff, then an organization can be ethically fit for difficult and challenging times. We will return to the ethics of organizations and organizational leadership in later units. We begin with you, the leader, and the challenges that face you as you take up the tools of ethics and seek to become ethically wise and fit.

Case Study: Ted Haggard

Ted A. Haggard (b. June 27, 1956) is a very well known charismatic Christian and evangelical leader. He was founder and pastor of New Life Church in Colorado Springs, Colorado, USA. He was the founder of the Association of Life-Giving Churches. From 2003-2006 he was president of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE).

According to Haggard, in November 1984, when he was an associate pastor of Bethany World Prayer Center in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, his confidant and mentor Danny Ost, a missionary to Mexico City, had a vision of Haggard founding his church in Colorado Springs. Accordingly, Haggard moved to Colorado shortly afterwards, and founded New Life Church. Initially, the 22 people who met in the basement of Haggard's house formed his church, which then grew to rented spaces in strip malls. Haggard was unconventional in his approach to ministering to people.

*Through random acts of kindness, Haggard would sometimes skip the morning offering and surprise needy people, like returning military personnel and single parents, with financial blessings by asking the congregation to lay money at their feet as they stood in front of the congregation. After 22 years, New Life Church operated from a campus in northern Colorado Springs and had a congregation of 14,000. In 1993, during what Haggard describes as his "first prayer journey," he traveled with a group to Israel. They stood on the Mount of Olives, where Haggard felt the Holy Spirit speak to him. "From that time until now," Haggard writes in *The Life-Giving Church*, "apostolic power has blessed me. My only problems are with me—not with the enemy, not with circumstances, not with people."*

Scandal and removal from job

In November 2006, prostitute and masseur Mike Jones alleged that Haggard had paid Jones to engage in sex with him for three years and had also purchased and used crystal methamphetamine. Jones said he had only recently learned of Haggard's true identity, and Jones explained his reasons for coming forward by saying, "It made me angry that here's someone preaching against gay marriage and going behind the scenes having gay sex." Jones made the allegations public in response to Haggard's political support for a Colorado Amendment 43 on the November 7, 2006, Colorado ballot that would ban same-sex marriage in that state. Jones told ABC News, "I had to expose the hypocrisy. He is in the position of influence of millions of followers, and he's preaching against gay marriage. But behind everybody's back [he's] doing what he's preached against." Jones hoped that his statements would sway voters.

...At first, however, [Haggard] claimed he had never met his accuser. Jones volunteered to take a polygraph test on a KHOW radio show hosted by Peter Boyles, where Jones first made the allegations. However, Jones's responses during the section of the polygraph test about whether he had engaged in sex with Haggard indicated deception. The test administrator, John Kresnik, discounted the test results because of Jones's stress and lack of eating or sleeping. Regardless, Haggard responded by saying, "We're so grateful that he failed a polygraph test this morning, my accuser did." Jones was not asked questions about drug use. Jones expressed doubt that he would retake the test, saying "I've made my point. He's the one who has discredited himself. He should admit it and move on." Haggard initially claimed he had never heard of his accuser and denied having ever done drugs and stated "I have no, I have never had a gay relationship with anybody." Many evangelical leaders initially showed support for Haggard and were critical of media reports.

Haggard later resigned as president of the National Association of Evangelicals. He went on administrative leave from his position as senior pastor of New Life Church, saying "I am voluntarily stepping aside from leadership so that the overseer process can be allowed to proceed with integrity. I hope to be able to discuss this matter in more detail at a later date. In the interim, I will seek both spiritual advice and guidance." On November 2, 2006, senior church officials told Colorado Springs television station KKTU that Haggard has admitted to some of the claims made by Jones. In an e-mail to New Life Church parishioners sent on the evening of November 2, Acting Senior Pastor Ross Parsley wrote, "It is important for you to know that he [Haggard] confessed to the overseers that some of the accusations against him are true."

Haggard admitted on November 3, 2006 that he had purchased methamphetamine and received a massage from Jones, but he denied using the drugs or having sex with Jones. "I called him to buy some meth, but I threw it away. I bought it for myself but never used it," Haggard claimed in a television interview, and added, "I was tempted, but I never used it..."

On November 3, 2006, Haggard resigned his leadership of the National Association of Evangelicals. The National Association of Evangelicals posted a statement accepting his resignation. Leith Anderson was appointed as the new president on November 7, 2006. The board cited the bylaws of the megachurch and said his conduct compelled them to remove him from his job. The "Overseer Board of New Life Church" released a prepared statement on the afternoon of November 4, 2006 that stated: "Our investigation and Pastor Haggard's public statements have proven without a doubt that he has committed sexually immoral conduct." ... [Note: Haggard was terminated by the Church and contracts entered into which gave him a \$138,000 severance pay and required that he not return to New Life, never live in Colorado again, and enter into counseling.]

In June 2008, the severance deal with New Life Church at an end, Haggard was "free to live where he wanted" and returned to his Colorado Springs home after living in Westwego, Louisiana, since 2007. Also in June, an email surfaced in which Haggard admitted masturbating with Jones and taking

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drugs, as alleged in 2006. Kurt Serpe, who provided the email, said Haggard "craved sex, he was a sexaholic." In November 2008, Haggard said in guest sermons at an Illinois church that his actions had roots in sexual abuse by an adult when he was seven years old. He also agreed to appear in Alexandra Pelosi's HBO documentary about his sex scandal titled "The Trials of Ted Haggard," that premiered on HBO in January 2009."¹

In October 2009, the Colorado Springs Independent published the first extensive interview with Haggard to appear in the secular press since the 2006 scandal. Over the course of a two and a half hour interview, the former Pastor talked about the scandal, his agreement never to return to New Life or the state of Colorado, suicidal ideation and the prospect of starting a new church in Colorado Springs. "Back in the old days," said Haggard, "when somebody would get in trouble, they'd just need to move 40 or 50 miles, or a hundred miles, and they could start again. Not anymore. Which is one of the reasons why we needed to come home. Because I needed to finish this story from here."¹

Ted Haggard returned in June 2008 to Colorado Springs after he was released from two contracts he had signed with New Life Church that had limited his residence and activity. In November 2009 he started a Bible study and a prayer group in his Colorado Springs. His website also indicates the following: "Ted Haggard and his wife, Gayle, currently live with their family in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Ted and Gayle spend their time writing and speaking. Ted is also working with a team to form MMGI Hope, Inc., a new non-profit benevolent organization designed to serve the poor and needy. Ted will serve as president and CEO of MMGI Hope."²

On June 2, 2010 he announced that he was starting another church in Colorado Springs named St. James Church ("faith is dead without works"). Since its founding, it has moved three times as Sunday attendance has grown from an initial 100 to 350 (as of September 2010).

In thinking through this tragic story, what are the questions that rise in your thinking? What do you think are the ethical boundaries Ted Haggard crossed in the past and may be crossing in the present. Think about this leader and write your reflections in answer to the questions in the following box (or on additional paper if the box is too small):

Think About It

Answer Box # 1

- 1) What are the ethical issues you see involved in this case study of Ted Haggard? Who are the responsible agents and what are their responsibilities?
- 2) Why do you think a born-again, Spirit-baptized, evangelical pastor with outstanding skills and accomplishments collapsed ethically? What happens to Christian leaders such as Ted Haggard who look so good?
- 3) What issues do you think there are in his returning to Colorado Springs and starting new ministries?

There are no easy answers to these questions. Certainly Ted Haggard's story is not yet complete, and we are not his judges. But we can learn from what occurred in his life. This tragedy is something that

¹ Based on en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ted_Haggard; accessed December 7, 2010

² http://www.tedhaggard.com/about_us.htm; accessed December 7, 2010

any of us could experience in our own lives but for the grace of God. Nevertheless, we want to know if there are things we can do to be as ethically fit as possible so when the temptations and pressures come, we are as ready for them as we can be as Christ followers.

I. Developing Ethical Fitness

You might ask: why is this important? It is important because even if employees or participants in our organization are highly motivated to do the right things in the right way (nothing good will happen without adequate motivation), nothing good will happen without adequate leadership. Poor leadership can undermine all the constructive activity in the rest of the organization. David Vogel's book, *The Market for Virtue*³ studied corporate social responsibility. It concludes that the key factor in a company becoming socially responsible and committing to virtue is the CEO or top manager.

This is not to say that the lower level leaders and managers are unimportant. For an ethically fit organization, we need not only the top management but also managers at all levels advocating and modeling ethical conduct focused by the mission, vision and values. It is critical that all managers are builders and tenders of an ethical organizational culture. Every employee or participant in an organization has a hand in showing ethical leadership, taking the role of mentoring others, especially new participants or employees, as well as contributing to the writing and revising of the code of conduct. However, the top leader or manager plays a particularly central role. Ethical fitness for the leader is a key component for an ethically fit organization.

A. Stages of ethical fitness

The **classical tradition** (including the Christian tradition) viewed ethical fitness in terms of the Aristotelian scheme of seeing six sorts of persons:

1. The godlike or altruistic person who displays a nearly supernatural or extraordinary (unnatural) proclivity for the virtues. We might call these ethical virtuosi⁴ or heroically moral persons. It is as though virtue is simply innate and at such a high level that the persons rise to the status of living "saints." The Roman Catholic Church speaks of works of supererogation—works that go beyond what God requires or duty mandates. People who do them regularly are "saints." These are not terms Protestants would normally use.
2. The virtuous person is firmly formed by having acquired settled habits and a disposition for ethically good conduct. She has an inner disposition that is strong and constant, developed through deep experience, careful deliberation and repeated actions of the proper sort. Over time, doing what is right and avoiding what is wrong has become second nature to her. There is no inner conflict because her motives and feelings are aligned with the right and the good. She has a well-developed intuition wedded to a realistic deliberation of the consequences of alternative actions. She sees and does what is right nearly all the time. This is a person who is ethically "fit."

These people might have a dire need for funds due to some sudden family crisis and have easy access to funds (or the ability to falsify expense reports in order to get additional money), but they are not tempted to secure those funds unethically or illegally. They have trained their inner compass to such a degree that they easily, regularly and with a certain degree of pleasure do what is good and right, even when it is personally costly. It is a question that is no longer seriously raised. There may be some twinges or slight pondering of the wrong sometimes, but they are quickly dismissed. The habit for right is strong.

3. The continent person manages to make the right decisions and to act properly but lacks a settled, strong habit or disposition. There is still an inner struggle to know and to do what is right. However, in the end this person almost always does the right thing. The inner motives and feelings are not yet fully aligned with what is right and good. His process of discernment and intuition is still not fully formed, though both lean toward what is virtuous. After a moral struggle he does what is right. We might term this person the conflicted right-doer. This is one who endures inner conflict but most of the time does what is right in the end. This is a person who is moving toward ethical fitness and has made real progress.

He or she might be tempted to have an affair with a close colleague at work. The inner feelings and longings are very real and powerful. He chooses not to do so, even when there is a strong

³ Brookings Institute, 2005.

⁴ Refers to people with special knowledge or skills.

(http://oxforddictionaries.com/view/entry/m_en_us1304409#m_en_us1304409, Accessed December 17, 2010.)

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attraction between them and an opportunity, perhaps when both parties are on a trip to a foreign land, in a context where no one would discover the indiscretion.

4. The incontinent person is similar to the continent. The habit of right decision-making and right acting is not yet fully developed. She struggles morally when faced with difficult choices, but she is weak-willed. She tends to fail. Instead of doing what she knows is right, she caves in to what is expedient or easy. This person is inwardly conflicted as well but frequently seems unable to follow through with what is right and good. This might be termed the conflicted wrong-doer. This is one who knows what is right and yet does the “guilty” pleasure or action. This is a person who is still far from being ethically fit.

We all recognize ourselves in this person! We overeat, eat food bad for us, do not exercise enough, allow our bodies over time to become unhealthy—we take one extra dessert dish or extra serving at a time. Or, we may think of someone on a work team who is pressured to “go along to get along” in a corrupt practice she knows and feels to be wrong. Perhaps she fears being an outsider in the group, some violence that might be done if she doesn’t go along, or maybe she is tempted by the incentive of sharing in significant revenues skimmed. She goes along and may justify it by saying “everyone is doing it.”

5. The vicious person has a firmly formed character like the virtuous, only the habits and disposition are dominated by vice. This terminology (‘vicious’) should not be understood as someone who is violent but rather as someone who is controlled by some vice or vices (our modern terminology would see the “addicted” as one example of such a person). This person is inwardly aligned so that feelings, motives and actions are integrated. He chooses easily and with regularity conduct that is habitually in the direction of what is not right or good. This is one who believes his behavior is apart of the good life, no matter what society in general may believe.

The person who is licentious or sexually promiscuous and sees no wrong in getting as much sex with as many desirable people as possible is an example. He says, this conduct is good and normal, given our human nature. He follows the “playboy” philosophy that sex is good and more sex is even better. The old qualms about sexuality and the notion of virginity before marriage and purity or faithfulness are outmoded prejudices of a past age. If it feels good, it is good.

6. The bestial person is as bad as the godlike person is good. This is a person without a conscience, who lives and behaves more like an animal than like a human being. This person is so degraded that he does what seems unthinkable behavior.

One thinks of a person like Jeffrey Dahmer, a man who murdered 17 men and boys over a period of many years until he was caught in 1991. Rape, torture, dismemberment, necrophilia and cannibalism were all involved in this gruesome conduct. In many of these persons there is no conscience. It has not developed, and they have no sense of guilt or wrongdoing in what everyone else recognizes as very, very bad conduct.

Think About It

Answer Box # 2

- 1) This is a Western philosophical model that was adopted by Western Catholicism. In what ways do you find it helpful in thinking about your own context and people? Is there an alternative model for thinking about ethical types or development in your cultural context? If so, describe it.
- 2) In thinking honestly about your own sense of ethical fitness, *how would you characterize yourself* using this scheme?

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In thinking about this classical scheme, one can recognize the child in the “incontinent” person. Children often know what is right but do not yet have strong self-control. Habits are not yet fully developed. They will develop habits over time. They can develop them in the direction of virtues or vices—or a mixture. Their badly trained or ill-mannered desires and feelings act against discerning clearly and acting rightly, largely due to their early age and small experience. They need guidance and mentoring into good habits that discipline the passions.

Passions do not necessarily draw us away from what is good or right, but they need to be brought under control and oriented toward the good. We recognize that part of maturity is learning self-control and self-direction. These virtues come with time and with experience in choosing the right direction. We want people who are passionate, deeply feeling people who have the joy of life. The fully mature person takes pleasure and finds fulfillment in his activities. Passion is not a bad thing, but it must fit into a life that hungers and thirsts after righteousness. Passion must be aligned with doing the right and good.

One of the problems with this model is that it tends to lead us to a sort of either/or: either you are virtuous or you are vicious, continent or incontinent. Yet we know people (even our own selves) who are largely virtuous in most areas of life but may have a secret or private vice that afflicts them. They display a **divided self**. The opposite is also true of the “vicious” who may have a few “redeeming features” of character (areas where they are virtuous). We often speak of a “besetting” sin—some particular weakness of character in a person who is otherwise upstanding and blameless. We all know how such a vice or incontinence can bring down a leader and an organization with him or her. We need to remember what we are seeking when we look for the ethically “fit” leader.

We are not looking for perfection but for a substantially well-formed person who does what righteousness requires regularly—and does it almost naturally. However, we also must attend to this issue of the divided self. This is someone like the athlete who appears by every measure of performance and experience to be very fit. Yet there may be a hidden heart problem, undetected by outward appearances. Suddenly, one day in an athletic contest or at practice, he or she collapses and dies from a deadly heart arrhythmia. Only afterwards are we able to see that an undiagnosed health problem was present that led to complete failure. We have experienced “good people” who have been admired by many suddenly collapsing morally or ethically because of a secret life unknown to others. Ted Haggard is an example. The question remains, how do we make progress? This is our next topic.

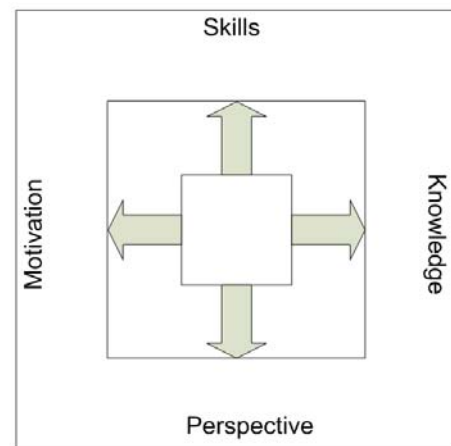
B. Marks of the ethically fit

1. Milestones for growth in ethical fitness

When we speak of the capacity for ethical fitness, Craig E. Johnson suggests four areas are important: knowledge, perspective, skills and motivation. We need to expand our knowledge and *understanding* of a variety of matters because ethical conduct must be based on the truth (true standards and the truth about a situation and ourselves). We also want to broaden our worldview and *ability to gain perspective* in order to frame situations clearly as we live in a globalizing context. *Skills* in things such as analysis, working with teams to develop an ethical climate and enacting ethical decisions—these need to be sharpened and brought to higher levels. As Christians, we understand that our *motivation* is at the root of character and ethical fitness. Ethical competence and fitness involve at least these four areas. If we grow in these areas, then Johnson argues we will find ourselves developing:

- a) Greater self-awareness and self-understanding;
- b) Greater self-confidence to shoulder the heavier ethical burdens;
- c) More ability to act as an ethical role model;
- d) A healthier moral imagination and sensitivity to the ethical issues involved in situations;
- e) Sounder moral reasoning;
- f) Better follow-through in carrying out ethical decisions;
- g) Greater resistance to outside pressures to set aside your convictions and moral principles;
- h) A stronger capacity to shape the moral and ethical climate and culture of your workplace.

While this list does not exhaust the changes that come with growth in our ethical fitness, it offers us some very real milestones that we can notice in ourselves and others. These milestones will mark our ability to be wise and consistent in our ethical conduct.



From Craig E. Johnson *Meeting The Ethical Challenges of Leadership*, 3rd Ed., p. 55.

Think About It

Answer Box # 3

Look over Johnson's list of milestones in developing ethical fitness. Where do you sense you have made the most progress? Which are the areas in which you need to work?

2. Theories of Leadership and Ethical Qualities

Until about 1940, most researchers thought leadership was a quality with which people were born, not something they could acquire. However, when they sought to isolate one set of traits common to all leaders (such as tall, extroverted, intelligent or good-looking), they could not. Therefore, this notion was largely abandoned.

The next generation of researchers developed what came to be known as situational or contingency models of leadership. Effective leaders, they said, had to adapt to elements of the situation, such as the nature of the task; the contextual matters; the emotional, motivational and skill levels of the followers; and the quality of the relationship between leaders and followers.

There were a couple of weaknesses in situational models. First, because so many things vary in situations, it was hard to know what style of leadership might work best. It was hard to apply in real life. Second, it seemed to give too much weight to the situation or context.

The next generation of leadership researchers developed more behaviorally oriented theories (behaviors that could be learned and that worked in many contexts and situations). Two of the most influential models are *transformational* and *servant leadership*.

At times in our courses we use "transformational" and "servant leadership" almost interchangeably. This is because both models of leadership are ethically grounded and have much in common. Both see the leader as one who is able to transform his or her followers and the organization he or she leads. They are marked by a number of clear characteristics, including ethical qualities. Without those ethical characteristics you do not have genuine "transformational" leadership or "servant leadership." Perhaps the main difference between the two is that servant leadership has key ethical qualities already built into it while transformational does not. Recent work on transformational leadership talks about "pseudo-transformational" leaders—those who are focused on transformation and effective outcomes but bypass ethical values or adopt values that are pseudo-values.

There is a third, more recent behavioral model of leadership ("authentic leadership") which is also ethically grounded. Not as much research or work has been done on it.⁵ It is not yet clear how it is distinct from transformational and servant leadership models. In this course we will review these two theories of leadership and identify their marks of good leadership, especially ethical qualities.

a) Transformational Leadership⁶ and Marks of Ethical Leadership

⁵ William L. Gardner, Bruce J. Avolio, Fred O. Walumbwa, editors. *Authentic Leadership Theory and Practice: Origins, Effects and Development* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2005); Bill George with Peter Sims, *True North: Discover Your Authentic Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007). Bill George argues that authentic leadership consists of: 1. Pursuing purpose with passion—purpose instills and disciplines passion; otherwise, egoistic needs and narcissistic vulnerabilities afflict the leader. 2. Practicing solid values—self-determined personal values are at the core of authenticity. 3. Leading with heart—authentic leaders are in touch with "heart," the passion and compassion that motivates people. 4. Establishing enduring relationships—authentic leaders are in for the long run and show the ability to forge enduring relationships. 5. Demonstrating self-discipline—high levels of performance involved in competing successfully demand self-discipline, and authentic leaders exhibit that. So, how does one become an authentic leader? First, by understanding oneself. The most difficult person to lead is your self. Second, becoming a great leader is a lifetime endeavor. You must commit yourself to continuous learning and development over a long period of time. See also: J. G. Bruhn, *Trust and Health of Organizations* (New York: Kluwer/Plenum, 2001).

⁶ James McGregor Burns, *Leadership* (New York: HarperCollins: 1979); *Transforming Leadership* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press:2003); Jim M. Kouzes and Barry Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 4th edition (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007); Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus, *Leaders: Strategies for Taking Charge* (New York: Harper Business Essentials, 2003).

One recognizes transformational leadership when leaders and followers engage each other in a way that raises one another to higher levels of motivation and morality. Transformational leaders create positive changes in followers and the organization. Such leaders connect with people's sense of identity and connect it to the mission and purpose of the organization. They are inspirational leaders, enhancing the motivation, morale and performance of the organization. They are "idealized" in that people take them to be moral exemplars of working toward the benefit of the individual, the team, the organization and community. The following four qualities mark the transformational leader:

- *Idealized influence*: Transformational leaders are admired and respected by their staff and followers. They are highly ethical people, dedicated to the well-being of their staff. They engender a spirit that encourages people to look out for each other and build encouraging and harmonious relationships. They put the needs of followers ahead of their own, and they embody the values and standards of the group. They serve as positive role models.
- *Inspirational motivation*: They are enthusiastic, positive and optimistic about the future. They raise team spirit in the group. They motivate by providing meaning to the work tasks and challenge followers to meet high standards. They do this by helping foster an energizing vision and challenging goals. By this they encourage followers to take greater ownership for their work.
- *Intellectual stimulation*: Learning is a value for this leader. They challenge assumptions, take risks and welcome the follower's ideas. They create an environment of creativity and innovation. They reward people who think independently. Instead of criticizing mistakes, they seek solutions to the issues that arise.
- *Individualized consideration*: They act as coaches and mentors. Their goal is to develop followers into leaders. They do it through personal development of the followers and by understanding the strengths and weaknesses of followers so as to align them with tasks and an individualized personal development path that will maximize their individual gifts and potential for leading. They are transformational leaders because they elicit positive and significant changes in their followers and organization by their leadership.

Followers feel trust, admiration, loyalty and respect toward the transformational leader. Because of the quality of relationship and feeling, followers are willing to work harder than originally expected.

This picture is not invariably true. Since the development of the transformational leadership model, some leaders have read research that shows significant improvement as a result of the behaviors associated with transformational leadership. Adopting many of these behaviors with a different orientation to the meaning of leadership, they set out to be effective, *but not necessarily ethical*. These are called pseudo-transformational leaders. (Hitler would be an example of an effective but unethical transformational leader). They care more about achieving outstanding, tangible results, whether or not those results model ethical conduct and fostering an ethical culture in the organization.

Authentic transformational leaders demonstrate altruism⁷ and integrity. They are not self-centered (as are pseudo-transformational leaders) and do not manipulate their followers in order to fulfill their personal goals.

b) *Servant Leadership*⁸ and the Marks of Ethical Leadership

The main premise of servant leadership is that the needs of the followers come first. The standard for evaluating leadership should be what happens in the lives of the followers. Do they grow? Are they healthier, wiser, freer and more likely to become servants themselves as a result of the time during which they are led by me? Servant leaders are the stewards of the organization's resources, human, financial and physical.

Larry Spears, head of the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, offers ten characteristics that are frequently found in the writings on servant leadership: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of others and building community. These are terms and behaviors that resonate with ethical values.

James W. Sipe's recent book on *Seven Pillars of Servant Leadership* (2009) list seven characteristics of servant leaders:

- Have good character;
- Put others first;

⁷ Unselfish regard for the well-being of others.

⁸ R. K. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977); L. C. Spears, Michele Lawrence, Ken Blanchard, eds. *Focus on Leadership: Servant leadership for the 21st Century*, 3rd Edition (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2001); Max DuPree, *Leadership as an Art* (New York: Doubleday, 1989); Peter Block, *Stewardship: Choosing Service over Self-Interest* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 1993). James W. Sipe, *Seven Pillars of Servant Leadership: Practicing the Wisdom of Leading by Serving* (New York: Paulist Press, 2009). <http://www.greenleaf.org/>

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- Are skilled communicators;
- Are compassionate collaborators;
- Use foresight;
- Are systems thinkers;
- Exercise moral authority.

Since we've spent much time on this model of leadership, we will not develop it in depth here. You can think back to all you have learned about servant leadership through the various courses and add to the list offered above.

In Appendix A we've listed a number of examples of companies who have adopted the servant leadership approach and seek to instill its principles throughout their companies. One is explicitly Christian in its stated mission, vision and values. A number of the others are simply secular companies who see the value of servant leadership to their operations. They want to do right and do it the right way. Servant leadership provides them with the framework to do so.

Think About It

Answer Box # 4

Look over the list of qualities of the transformational and the servant leaders. What would you say are the six most important characteristics you would like to describe your character and conduct? Are there any additional qualities you would add? What would they be?

C. Developing ethical fitness

You already know the conditions and disciplines for developing ethical fitness as a leader. This is not a separate department of life. It is an integral part of your overall development as a person. To become wise and strong in ethical conduct and character means committing to a long-term learning process. As Craig E. Johnson indicated above, it involves deepening our motivation and inner commitment to righteousness and justice, broadening our knowledge and understanding, sharpening our practical skills at living justly and wisely and heightening our horizons to be able to see things in the light of truth.

When we look at the most ethical person who ever lived, Jesus Christ, we see this in action. He does not begin his ministry until he is thirty years of age and ready to bear the heavy burdens of ethical challenge. Luke tells us that the foundations of his human maturity and wisdom were built as he grew, especially in the years between twelve and thirty). "As Jesus grew up, he increased in wisdom and in favor with God and people." (Luke 2:52) Hebrews gives us a window into his development as well. "During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered." (Hebrews 5:7-8)

What are some steps we can take to work on our own ethical fitness? Here are a few (this list is not exhaustive):

1. Find a Role Model and Mentor

Much of what we know and enact are the result of seeing others do things. They model, and we find that pattern imprinted on our inner self. We find ourselves responding in similar ways. We think of such exemplary people because they have responded well in moral crises. Some of them we know only through books or the news. We have not worked with them in person, but they get a lot of press and notoriety. We learn from reading about what they have done to face ethical challenges and what they did to resolve them.

The more important models are those with whom we live every day, in the daily valleys, not the heroic peaks of life. Most of our learning about how to handle moral and ethical work is done in ordinary life where smaller ethical temptations and dilemmas repeatedly confront us. We need people around us who are consistently engaged in moral or ethical work, people we can talk with and who can think through the issues and options that we face daily.

Studies of people who are positive moral role models indicate they share the following three characteristics: 1) certainty—they know what they believe and act on the basis of those beliefs; 2)

positivity—they are optimistic and positive in approaching life, even when times are hard; 3) integral identity—their ethical convictions and their sense of self/identity are not separate things; their sense of morality is part of their central self. These are characteristics of mature wisdom.

We learn an enormous amount from good mentors. Research has shown the importance of those who are more experienced and skillful in handling ethical matters mentoring the less experienced. Making good decisions and enacting them well is a skill and an art that is learned by doing. A mentor can help with wisdom and as an example to guide us so that we learn more rapidly and deeply—and hopefully with fewer missteps. Sometimes our mentors are our peers when we find ourselves without an older wise person.

2. Construct a Personal Mission/Values Statement

Having a clear sense of our calling and the end toward which we want our lives to move provides us with direction and identity. We develop a mental picture of who we want to be and what we want to accomplish, and then we follow through with plans. This process identifies the results we want and enables us to make better decisions about our time and commitments.

Rather than drift aimlessly, we identify the moral compass that will guide us on our journey. Our mission tells us where we want to go and the sorts of things we hope to bring about through the investment of our life energy and gifts. Our values equip us with a set of boundaries and a frame of reference for setting priorities. They help us become more sensitive to the moral temptations and dilemmas that we encounter in everyday life. They shape the way we analyze situations and come to decisions with which we can live.

A personal mission and a values statement force us to be thoughtful and reflective about ourselves. What are our gifts and things about which we feel passionate? Who do we hear God calling us to be, and what does God call us to do in our generation? What kind of person must we become in order to do that faithfully? How do we live a blameless and righteous life in the occupation and sector of society in which we find ourselves? What values or ethical standards are particularly important to the type of work and companions with which we are engaged?

3. Develop Strong Habits

Much of the focus of this course is on habit formation. As we move from codes of conduct through consequences of action to motives and character, we are moving deeper into the interior of the human person. Strong character is integral to successful leadership. Virtues are positive leadership qualities that comprise our moral character. Virtues are habits that are built into our response patterns such that we find it second nature to discern the right thing to do and then to do it easily and with pleasure.

We have stressed the wisdom virtue of prudence, the habit or practice of making well-formed and correct judgments with regard to practical situations. In addition, we can list a series of other virtues that need to be nurtured.

- Courage—the capacity to overcome fear in order to do the right thing;
- Integrity—a whole, consistent life because we have developed discernment, forthrightness and steadfastness;
- Humility—a realistic view of oneself and others so that we are modest about our achievements and open to others, seeing the opinions and achievements of others as valuable and important;
- Optimism—a positive perspective that sees the future in the hands of God, knowing that good things are still to come;
- Compassion—an emotional connectedness to the sufferings and hardships of others so that we are kind, generous, merciful and loving towards others even when they are not that way towards us;
- Justice—a connection to the common good and a sense of balance that enables us to be fair and treat others equally;
- Reverence—awe before the Creator and Redeemer that respects his creation and Word.

4. Learn from Hardship

Count on it—hard times will come to every leader. Moses spent forty years in the desert. Jesus suffered in his short life. Paul gives a long list of the things he suffered, even before he was held in prison for several years in the end of Acts. In modern times we can think of the imprisonment of Nelson Mandela or the suffering of Gandhi or even the voluntary hardships chosen by someone like Sister Teresa. Leaders tell us about failure, career setbacks, personal trauma, difficult colleagues and betrayal; they often say those difficult times were when they learned the most about leadership.

Research tells us that leaders develop most rapidly when they encounter situations that stretch or test them. Hardship as well as conflict, novel situations, difficult goals, difficult people and unplanned

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crises—all of these challenge leaders to their core. It is in such stressful times that they learn how well they have been strengthened everyday through habit formation, mentoring and pursuing their mission and values. To be sure, challenges can break leaders down rather than build them up. There is no guarantee that leaders will learn from hardships. They can become embittered and cynical.

Effective leaders tell stories about how much they learned from hard times. Often they look back on the hard times as the high points of their careers because of all they learned. They see the hard times as stepping stones rather than insurmountable obstacles (in contrast to the less successful leaders).

Often hard times occur when ethical temptations and dilemmas are particularly powerful. Rather than endure the hardship, we look for easy ways out. We seek to end the suffering and difficulty before they have had their full effect on our character. By living through them and keeping our integrity and values intact, we are prepared for even more complex and difficult ethical situations.

We do not need to seek out hard times—they will seek us out and come upon us like a sudden thunderstorm. We can't plan for hard times, but we can prepare ourselves to be ready for them. The days of crisis shine a light on all that has been happening in all the months and years we have been living without crisis.

Think About It

Answer Box # 5

As you think about your ethical formation as a leader, what would you say have been the most important things in your becoming as ethically fit as you are right now? What has caused you to learn to respond ethically?

II. Enacting Ethical Fitness

All you have read and learned as you have worked through this unit and its reading culminates here. The ethical leader is one who:

Regularly acts from good motives in conformity with high ethical standards in wise ways so that the consequences preserve important and worthwhile values.

Leading in a value-based manner is at the heart of transformational and servant leadership. With clarity about the standards that guide us personally and organizationally and with the development of strong character and wisdom, we will be able to lead our organizations with effectiveness and integrity. This course is designed to equip you with the tools and knowledge to become ethically fit.

It is now up to you to put yourself and your organizations on the path to authentic righteousness. May God help you be known as many of the flawed yet faith-filled figures of the Bible—blameless in behavior and wise in conduct.

We end this module with a list of ten principles of highly ethical leaders and organizations. In some ways we are ending where many Christians begin when they think about ethics. You will notice that this list is a translation of the Ten Commandments into appropriate conduct for the leader. We will probe the Ten Commandments in greater detail in later units.

David Gill's Ten Principles of Highly Ethical Leaders & Organizations⁹

1. Treat all people as unique, valuable individuals.

Never treat anyone as worthless, dispensable, or "just a number."

2. Support the freedom and growth of others.

Never view anyone through stereotypes and images, or as fixed and unchangeable.

3. Communicate to others by name with respect.

Never ignore people or use demeaning, trivializing, or derogatory names/labels.

⁹ http://www.ethixbiz.com/tools/key_principles%20pdf.pdf accessed December 1, 2010. Notice that these are derived from the implications of the Ten Commandments and each corresponds to the command of the same order. Later on we will review David Gill's excellent exposition of those commands.

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4. Model and encourage a balanced life of good work and rest.

Never adopt policies or make demands on others that undermine balanced lives.

5. Honor and respect the families and friends of others.

Never undervalue the significance of families and friends of employees.

6. Protect the life, safety and health of others.

Never harm or jeopardize the physical well-being of anyone.

7. Keep commitments and agreements in a trustworthy, reliable manner.

Never betray your relational commitments or undermine those made by others.

8. Promote fairness in matters of money and property.

Never tolerate unfair wages, price or financial practices.

9. Communicate truthfully and constructively.

Never mischaracterize people, products, services or facts.

10. Cultivate a positive and generous attitude.

Never give in to negativity, anger, greed or envy.

III. Models: Rebekah

Our understanding of what it means to please God with ethical integrity can be assisted by examining the lives of people who showed what this means in their lives. One striking thing about the Bible is that the largest part of it is narrative—stories of people whose lives were surrounded by the reality of God and everyday struggles in both quiet and complex times. Even the law is given to us in the midst of the story of God making a great nation of the family of Abraham. In one sense the entire Old Testament is one long story comprised of many smaller stories. We listen to those stories because they provide images of lives lived well or poorly. These histories tell the stories of many different people. In doing so, they model many of the principles and prudence we find in law, prophecy and wisdom. Without stories, the Bible could be a dry book of abstractions.

In a similar manner the New Testament is organized around narrative. It begins with the story of Jesus repeated four times. It is as though it were saying to us, “Listen to this story! Have you heard it yet? Let me tell it to you again from a slightly different perspective. And now again and again. This is *The Story* which is the key to all the other stories.” The teachings of Christ are embedded in a story and cannot be simply abstracted from that story context. We need to remember that. We learn the shape of a God-pleasing life from the histories we are told just as much as from the principles, commands and instructional proverbs we are given.

The book of Acts gives us the story of the earliest Christians, and the letters of Paul and the General Epistles interpret the meaning of that story for our lives. The New Testament begins with what God is doing for us in Christ. It then moves on to the story of early Christ followers before offering us concentrated instruction through letter, epistle, sermon and prophecy. Many of these latter books of the New Testament refer back to the story of Jesus as well as the churches and people we meet in Acts.

These stories provide us with living embodiments of the values and conduct of the God-pleasing life. It is as though we become friend with these characters as we read and re-read their stories and meditate on the choices they faced and the decisions they made. We discover in them saints and sinners. They are good company to have as friends. They give testimony to the realities and challenges of the life of faith. The author of Hebrews gives inspiring examples of faithful men and women from histories in the Old Testament. We will be spending a little time with a number of them because of the importance of examples for learning to become ethical people.

We should note that these stories and persons are not models in the sense of ideal people whose lives and actions give us comprehensive or complete images of the God-pleasing life. Only Christ does that. Rather, there are specific elements of their lives that are exemplary and held up to us as models with respect to certain values and principles of life. We start with one of these models presented to us only implicitly in Hebrews 11. Isaac is mentioned in a story that is deeply shaped by his wife Rebekah.

Read: Genesis 24:12-31, 52-67; 25:20-28; 26:34-27:17, 27:41-28:9; cf. Hebrews 11:20

Bible reading: Read the above biblical texts before continuing the module below.

Rebekah is a decisive matriarch and the mother of Jacob (Israel) and Esau. Commentators have often seen her simply as a scheming wife or an obedient vessel. Much of the picture of Rebekah found in commentary is more negative about her than the story itself.

When we first meet her, we are impressed at her embodiment of the value of hospitality, drawing water for the servant of Abraham and even for the camels. She does not stop “at the first mile” of hospitable obligations but goes the “second mile” as well. When she is faced with the choice of leaving family and returning with the servant to be married to her cousin, Isaac, she readily agrees to go without

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delay.¹⁰ She displays a character that is decisive and independent, and she enacts conduct that goes beyond the strict letter of the requirements of duty.

In the pregnancy and birth narrative we learn two things. Though it was difficult for her to conceive, she was pregnant in answer to prayer. Prayer was an integral part of her character. When the pregnancy is difficult she (alone?) learns the secret of her twins—two peoples and nations will come from her womb, and the older will serve the younger. At this birth event Isaac was already sixty years old.

The rest of the story is well-known. This was not the ideal family. Isaac and Rebekah repeat the mistake of Abraham and Sarah—they favor one child over another, and in the next generation Jacob will repeat this bad conduct with his own children. This time there is disunity, with Isaac favoring the older twin, Esau, and Rebekah favoring the younger, Jacob. Was this because of the word of the Lord that she knew about her sons? Did she favor Jacob because of the prophecy? Whatever its cause, this favoritism laid the ground for a great rift in the family.

Rebekah takes the initiative and provides the scheme for Jacob to gain the blessing that rightfully belonged to the eldest. When Esau's anger threatens Jacob's life, she lays the plans for Jacob to escape and find sanctuary with her brother Laban. In the midst of a lot of unwise and bad conduct, God's providence is at work, using even these actions to bring fulfillment of his promises to Abraham.

Normally we will underline the positives in people's lives from biblical stories, despite the fact that their lives were often mixed. In this case we have already highlighted Rebekah's decisiveness and hospitality. Now we note one of her ethical challenges and what she did about it. Even though she engaged in ethically questionable conduct, one of the consequences turned out, with God's providence, to be positive. Yet we can hardly say she displays the qualities of one who is ethically fit.

- **Her ethical challenge:** To believe the word of the Lord about her twin sons.
- **Her (un)ethical action:** Showing favoritism to one child and using deceit to advance him.
- **Her temptation:** To manipulate people in order to secure the word of the Lord.
- **The cost of her doing what was wrong:** The loss of the companionship of her favorite son.
- **The reward of her doing what was wrong:** Jacob's life was preserved so he could become Israel.

It may seem strange to talk about "the reward of her doing what was wrong," but it corresponds to the way life sometimes turns out in this fallen world. Life is hard. Life is not fair. We all experience favoritism that helps us and favoritism that hinders us. In our workplace we know leaders who unfairly and unjustly pass over our gifts and achievements in favor of someone who does not really merit the recognition and promotion they are given (or leaders who may treat us as the favored one unfairly).

One of the temptations of all leaders is to show favoritism. It is a form of injustice and creates all sorts of ill feelings and bad effects. If we are experiencing that sort of treatment, we need to remember this story—God's will is not thwarted by this bad conduct.

At the same time, we always need to ask ourselves as we think about succession and the development of leaders after us—are we exhibiting favoritism or good judgment? Even with the twelve apostles there was an "inner circle" of three. When Jesus was mentoring the twelve, he also recognized and responded to a few of them with special intent. Investing ourselves more in some than in others may not be favoritism, but rather the acknowledgement of the gifts and callings of those we lead and mentor.

Think About It

Answer Box #6

Have you experienced favoritism (or exercised it yourself)? How did you respond to it?

The Examples in Hebrews 11

¹⁰ In later (monarchical) Israel, marriage between cross cousins was a preferred pattern in order to keep property in the male lineage. In an earlier pattern we have parallel cousin marriage, where one marries a first cousin related through same sex siblings—Abraham and Nahor were brothers. Later Jacob will marry his cross cousins (daughters of his mother's brother). The "ethics" of marriage within family lines varies significantly in different cultures.

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Enoch, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the Old Testament prophets of God—these men and women were not perfect, but the way they lived offers us an example of how we can live today in a way that pleases God. Study and analysis of these biblical leaders can offer additional insight into how we may better live our lives as Christian leaders in our generation.

The Old Testament offers us not only positive examples but also negative ones as well. Paul wrote about the disobedience of God's people during the time of Moses. He wrote, "Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did." (1 Corinthians 10:6)

After describing their idolatry (Exodus 32) Paul writes, "These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come." (1 Cor. 10:11) The study of the lives of those who lived poorly as well as the lives of those who lived well can instruct us.

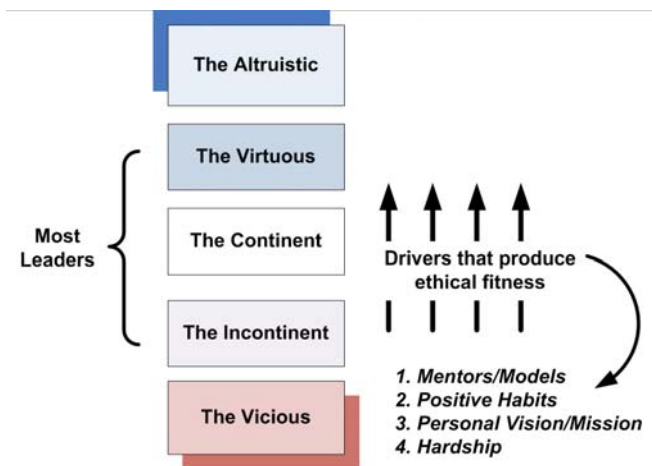
Because of our own vulnerability to temptation, we can pray with deep feeling the phrase in the following prayer that Jesus taught his disciples: "Deliver us from evil." (Matthew 6:13) Let us, therefore, follow the positive ethical examples of those who have gone before us, and let us heed the negative examples of those who have made faulty ethical choices so that we might make the necessary changes in our lives, be able to lead with moral integrity and so please the Lord and serve God's people well.

Summary

In this module we focused on the following primary objective: *the formation of a leader to be ethically fit*. This unit was about character and its formation with key virtues. The tragic figure of Rev. Ted Haggard served as our starting point. What does it mean to become ethically fit? How does that take place? We looked at the stages of ethical fitness, reviewing the Western Christian model of the well-formed, wise, mature and virtuous individual and the various types that have not achieved this level of development. Most of us find ourselves as a combination of "continent" and "incontinent." Our character is not fully developed with the entire range of virtues. We are partly prudent, mainly courageous, nearly just in our dealings and so on. We are still on our way to the development of the qualities that mark the transformational and servant leader.

We looked briefly at four of the many elements that enable us to grow and become more skillful in our ethical perspective and conduct—connecting with mentors and models, developing our own personal mission and values, developing strong positive habits and learning from hardship.

Rebekah served as our last biblical model, showing us a mixed picture of a strong, independent, decisive person who also used deception and favoritism within her family. Most leaders we know are mixed in their ethical fitness. God is still able to work with us in order to accomplish God's redemptive purposes! That is grace!



Unit 2 Final Assignment

Final Assignment

1. Write on one to two pages your reflections about the key elements involved in becoming ethically fit. How does the classically Christian model traditionally used to think about stages or points along the development of ethical fitness (such as the continent and the incontinent) work in your cultural context? Are there other models that are better suited to what happens as people mature and learn to be more ethically fit?
2. On another one to two pages, write what you think you need to do in order to take the next steps in becoming more ethically fit? Where are you now, and what do you think would be of the greatest value for you to prioritize over the next year to a year and a half?
3. Please confirm that you have discussed the results of your interactive work in Unit 02 (“Think About It” boxes) with a group of two other people. (See “Note on Process” on page v in the “Expectations for the Course” section of the Introduction to the Course.)
4. Have you read Stott pp. 485-499 “A Call for Christian Leadership”?

When your work is complete (three to five pages total), send a copy to your facilitator via email as an attachment. Please send it by the date indicated in the Module Calendar.

Appendix A

I. TD Industries

<http://www.tdindustries.com/>

TD Industries is an employee-owned company focused on mechanical construction and services. It applies servant leadership principles and philosophy to its company as a way of shaping its organizational culture and practices. Here are some elements from its website.

Mission Statement

We are committed to providing outstanding career opportunities by exceeding our customers' expectations through continuous aggressive improvement.

Values: Our Basic Values

Servant leaders are active listeners. They elicit trust and share power. Our basic values listed below are the most important characteristic of TD and guide all of our relationships—with our customers, our suppliers, our communities and among ourselves.

- Concern for and belief in individual human beings;
- Valuing individual differences;
- Honesty;
- Building trusting relationships;
- Fairness;
- Responsible behavior;
- High standards of business ethics.

We further believe in:

- Long-term goals—we do not seize short-term benefits to the detriment of our long-term mission.
- Continuous, intense people-development efforts, including substantial training budgets.
- Investment in tools, equipment and facilities that enable us to better accomplish our mission.

To Lead, First You Must Follow

TD uses Robert Greenleaf's essay, *The Servant as Leader*, as a blueprint for our behavior. Greenleaf was inspired by Herman Hesse's novel, *Journey to the East*. In Hesse's story, a band of men on a mythical journey are served by a servant named Leo, who performs menial chores but who inspires them with his uplifting and infectious spirit. Leo leaves the group and everything falls apart. The men disband. The journey is abandoned. Not until later does the narrator, a member of the original band of men, discover Leo as the noble, inspiring leader of the order who had sponsored his original journey. In essence, this philosophy suggests that every person can become a leader by first serving and then, through conscious choice, leading.

Every TD employee (or TD Partner) completes Basic Servant Leadership training. Those that aspire to lead will spend many more hours in the classroom and receive regular feedback on their performance. Ethics For Living and Leading, Version 3.0

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Our commitment to this philosophy has created an environment where partners trust leadership to listen to their thoughts and ideas. And, in turn, leadership has learned to trust the judgment of partners.

A brief account of Greenleaf's philosophy teaches us that:

- People can and should work together to grow a company. If an organization is to live up to its basic values and vision, a key ingredient will be leadership from all of us.
- Simply and plainly defined, leaders are people who have followers. They have earned recognition and respect.
- Leaders are first a servant of those they lead. They are a teacher, a source of information and knowledge and a standard setter more than a giver of directions or a disciplinarian.
- Leaders see things through the eyes of their followers. They put themselves in others' shoes and help them make their dreams come true.

There are a lot more great ideas that make up the servant leadership philosophy.

At TD, servant leadership is a way of life that deeply enhances our culture and our business. It's what makes us such a great place to work.

Here are the rest of Robert Greenleaf's thoughts.

- Leaders do not say, "Get going." Instead, they say, "Let's go!" and lead the way. They do not walk behind with a whip; they are out in front with a banner.
- Leaders assume that their followers are working with them. They consider others to be their partners in the work and see to it that they share in the rewards, and they glorify the team spirit.
- Leaders are people builders. They help people to grow because the leader realizes that the more people grow, the stronger the organization will be.
- Leaders do not hold people down—they lift them up. They reach out their hand to help their followers scale the peaks.
- Leaders have faith in people. They believe in them. They have found that others will rise to high expectations.
- Leaders use their heart as well as their head. After they have looked at the facts with their head, they let their heart take a look too.
- Leaders keep their eyes on high goals. They are self-starters. They create plans and set them in motion. They are people of thought and action—both dreamers and doers.
- Leaders are faced with many hard decisions, including balancing fairness to an individual with fairness to the group. This sometimes requires "weeding out" those in the group who, over a period of time, do not measure up to the group needs of dependability, productivity and safety.
- Leaders have a sense of humor. They are not stuffed shirts. They can laugh at themselves. They have a humble spirit.
- Leaders can be led. They are not interested in having their own way, but in finding the best way. They have an open mind.

In addition to reading *The Servant as Leader*, we encourage you to learn from our TD Training Partners (links can be found on the TD website). You'll see how this leadership style turns people and organizations into successful forces.

II. FirstFruits: Broetje Orchards

http://douglasfir.viviotech.net/~mckernm_bo/index.cfm?pagelD=A5B85459-6A66-16BD-9FDCF6E05F45E7E6

Broetje Orchards is unique in the apple growing and packing industry because we are founded on the belief that faith and business can be incorporated in a single mission. The Broetje Orchards brand—FirstFruits of Washington—refers to a Biblical festival during which the people offered the first and best of their harvests to God in the knowledge that they were dependent on God for their survival and blessings. Likewise, we offer our first fruits—in the form of profits—to help people and communities around the world, and as recognition of God's role in the success of our business. Broetje Orchards is committed to a "servant leadership" model to guide its activities. It means that our business goals are not separated from our spiritual values. Broetje Orchards is committed to caring for those who work in our business and for those in need around the world. Each year we donate approximately 75% of our profits to local, domestic, and international projects through our Vista Hermosa Foundation and carry out our model of business through affiliated businesses and ministries that we have created over the years. We believe that this ethical foundation is the primary reason for our company's business success.

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Vision:

Founded in 1979 by Ralph and Cheryl Broetje as an integrated grower, packer, and shipper of quality Washington State apples and cherries, Broetje Orchards is bearing "fruit that will last" through:

- Leading and serving with compassion;
- Looking for the good in all people;
- Fostering community;
- Providing opportunity for purpose and meaning;
- Developing caring relationships;

...for our workers and their families, our customers and vendors, and our local and international ministries.

Mission:

Jesus said "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other." (John 15:16, 17 NIV)

Our Core Values:

As Christian stewards, we base our relationships and the action of our companies and employees on five core values:

- LOVE. God has destined us in love. (Ephesians 1:4-5)
Live life as God's beloved son/daughter.
- COMMUNITY. Everything in the cosmos is connected. (Col 1: 15-20)
Teach, model and reward teamwork.
- RESPECT. All people are created in God's image. (Genesis 1:27)
Look for the good in all people, especially those now marginalized.
- COMPASSION. God rules with compassion. (Luke 12:41-48)
Empower one another in service to the common good.
- PURPOSE. God has a purpose for the world and for every person in it. (1 Cor: 12)
Find ways to help individuals and institutions discover and practice purpose.

Servant Leadership Philosophy:

The phrase "Servant Leadership" was coined by Robert K. Greenleaf in "The Servant as Leader," an essay that he first published in 1970. In that essay, he said:

The servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is leader first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions.

The Greenleaf Philosophy

At Broetje Orchards we seek to employ this philosophy in all that we do, seeing the whole person and not just the employee. We recognize that each person has gifts to share and that many times they simply need an opportunity to be able to explore and share these gifts.

We are not perfect, but strive to become better, testing ourselves with Greenleaf's best test:

- Do those served grow as persons?
- Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?
- And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit or at least not be further deprived?"

III. The Container Company

<http://standfor.containerstore.com/>

Ethics for Living and Leading
Unit 3
Where Do We Find
Resources for Ethical Guidance?



Development Associates International

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Development Associates International, 2005
Revised by Dr. David A. Fraser, 2010

Version 3.0

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Unit 3 - Where Do We Find Resources for Ethical Guidance? (The Bible as the foundation for Christian ethics and worldview.)

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Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this unit you will be able to:

- Explain the relationship of ethics to the Christian life;
- Specify several ways a Christian worldview influences ethical life and leadership;
- Analyze the ethical decisions of a biblical character;
- State what Christ-likeness means and its importance in ethical action;
- Provide an initial outline of the challenges of ethical living and leadership.

Steps to Complete Unit 3

Read and Respond

Read the lecture notes in the workbook. There will be space to respond from time to time as you read the text. Please follow the instructions before continuing your reading.

Readings are included at the end of most units. These texts provide biblical and cultural framework for an adequate understanding of Christian ethics. Please reflect and respond as indicated in assignments found within the texts.

Supplementary text: John R. W. Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, 4th Edition (Zondervan, 2006). For Unit 3, please read 49-70 "Our Complex World: Is Christian Thinking Distinctive?"

Lecture Notes & Workbook

Introduction & Overview

The sum of Christian ethics is simply this: "God wants his moral and spiritual character (and behavior) replicated in his people. As God is holy, just, righteous, loving, compassionate, merciful, and so on, he expects his people to be."¹

Christian ethics is first and foremost the life of Christ replicated in his followers. Ethics is a part of the transformation that begins with salvation, continues in sanctification and finds its fullness in glorification. God takes fallen human beings and their communities and transforms them progressively by grace through faith. This transformation involves not only the initiative of God's grace but also the human response—the imitation of Christ and the works of faith, hope and love.

The language of the Bible is that of "image." We as humans were not only made in God's image but also our actions, relationships and communities are to image the very character and conduct of God. Living as the image of God is not simply a given attribute but a daily activity. When we love another human sacrificially and compassionately, God is imaged in our relationship with that person. Being made in the image of God gives us the capacity to image God in our actions and relationships.

Ethics is about the shape of the Christ-life in us as individuals and between us in our communities and groups. For the individual it means becoming more Christ-like in all dimensions of life—our attitudes and character as well as our actions and ways of relating to others. At the same time, our communities (church and other) are to be small images of the coming Kingdom of God. The values and patterns of that Kingdom are to be incarnated in our norms, institutions, organizations and ways of operating. We are those who God on earth both at the individual and at the communal level.

The Christian life is more than ethics but not less. God's will includes callings, gifts, responsibilities and activities for specific groups and individuals that do not apply to everyone. These elements form important parts of the Christian life for different people. However, the ways in which we carry out these elements of God's will often fall into the sphere of Christian ethics.

God's will includes not just what we do as followers of Jesus but also how we do it. It includes not only accountability for the results of our action but also for the intentions of our heart and the formation of our character. God's will informs the ways in which we perform the obligations of our social roles or organizational positions. The Christian life embraces the ways in which God wants all Christians to live as they carry out their daily lives and work. This is the heart of Christian ethics and is also at the heart of what God desires of all of us if we are to please God. Understanding God's moral will, making decisions and carrying out actions that reflect God's will constitute a central challenge for us all.

Character is central to God's moral will for us. While we know that good people can do some really bad things and really bad people can do the right thing, these are exceptions to the rule. The urgent question remains, how can we become good people with strong moral character and wise decision making skills? How can we become ethically fit? In addition, we want to help others in our sphere of influence take the path to become people of integrity and love. How can we do that unless we ourselves are wise and strong in the ways of the Lord? We also need to recognize that our identity, values and formation are tied up with important communities. We become ethically fit and strong only in the context of a community of others who help shape our views and conduct.

Character issues involve more than simply the character of individual persons. We can speak of the character of our communities as well—are they just? Are they hospitable, welcoming to the stranger and helpful to the hurting? Do they empower the weak and lift up the humble with the way they work? Are our institutions fair and life-giving? What about our formal organizations? How can a corporation become a great place to work, a nursery for developing leaders of effectiveness and integrity? How can corporations be organizations that care for the environment (instead of pollute it), that provide products that are safe, effective and cost efficient to the public?

In this unit we focus on where we find the resources for ethical guidance, at both the individual and the corporate level.

¹ Ben Witherington III, *The Indelible Image: The Theological and Ethical Thought World of the New Testament*, Volume 1, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009, p. 19.

Think About It

Answer Box # 1

In thinking about your experience as a follower of Christ, how would you say “ethics” is a part of your spiritual journey? What part does ethics play in your walk as a Christian? Where do you find guidance for making ethical choices?

I. A Starting Point: Worldview Questions

Ethics only makes sense within a larger set of commitments and understandings about the world. We need to know the “lay of the land” as well as the best destinations if we are to journey through life well. Ethical guidelines are as important to us for finding our way in life as good maps and directions are for us finding our way geographically. Without a good map, you can get lost, waste a lot of time wandering about and may never reach the destination you seek. One key map that helps us to discover ethical guidelines is the worldview map.

A worldview is a set of presuppositions we hold about the basic structure of the world and our place in it. It can be seen as a map of the universe that answers basic questions. In answering these questions, we begin to get a sense of who we are, what our purpose and mission on earth might be and where this whole sweep of history of which we are a small part is going. Worldviews answer very fundamental questions of identity and direction—who are we and where should we be headed as we seek to steer our lives into the future? Worldviews give us answers to basic questions such as the following:

- What is prime reality—the really real?
- What is the nature of external reality, i.e., the world around us?
- What is a human being? What constitutes the ideal or good human life?
- What is the relationship between the individual and the community? What is “the good society” like?
- What happens to a person at death?
- What sort of knowledge do we have, and why is it possible to know anything at all?
- How do we know what is right and wrong? How do we know what is truly valuable and worthwhile?
- What is the meaning of human history (and the history of all Creation)?

Each of these questions contains a host of smaller questions. In asking ‘what is a human being’, we also ask about the meaning of our existence, our purpose and highest goals, the sort of life that is the best life for humans, the meaning of gender differences and similarities, our relationship to the animals and the rest of nature and many similar questions. Where do we find answers for these basic questions?

Worldviews are shaped by the long histories of civilizations and traditions. We are all born into those civilizations and absorb the outlook of our culture almost unwittingly. Think of how different the worldviews of North America are from those of China, India, Islamic cultures, the sub-Saharan African continent or the Latin world. There are many ways humans choose to arrange their lives. They shape us so thoroughly that we find our preferences and habits as “natural” and those of others as “strange.”

Most of the time we do not consciously raise worldview questions, or if we do, the answer to them seems obvious, at least until we encounter people from a different worldview background. Then we wonder not only at the strangeness of other ways of looking at the world but also why we view the world as we do. We suddenly become aware that there are very different ways of looking at the world, ways that lead to quite different conclusions about things like right and wrong and what might be of real value to pursue in life.

Think of it this way. A worldview is a sort of map. It tells us how things are laid out. It enables us to locate ourselves within a larger set of realities and to see where we need to journey, given our desired destination. It even tells us what is really real and what is only imaginary. It provides the largest picture we have of all things that make up the world in which we live, including ourselves. *Ethics only makes sense within a larger worldview and some clear sense of the purpose and mission of the human being.* Different worldview maps suggest very different ethical guidelines. Different notions of the purpose of the human being lead to very different ethics. We can see something very distinctive about the Christian worldview when you compare it with other worldviews.

Think About It

Answer Box # 2

Reflecting on your own understanding of the Christian worldview, how would you give short, to-the-point answers to these worldview questions?

1. What is reality?
2. What is a human being?
3. What is a good human community? What does it look like?
4. What is the meaning of human history?
5. How do we know what is good or bad, right or wrong?

We will be encountering a number of worldviews, mainly religious ones. As they unfold their answers to fundamental questions and map a picture of the world, they offer the foundations for very different ethical conclusions and recommendations. This is not to say they don't all share some common ground and agreement about some very abstract principles. (Most would affirm the following guideline: gratuitously killing innocent human beings is wrong.) However, they often have different understandings of those principles and how they play out in given situations. While killing newborn twins is seen as such gratuitous murder by most cultures, in some worldviews and cultures it is seen as an essential act of protecting the community against evil. Similarities in broad agreement about principles may not mean agreement in particular instances of human conduct.

For Christians, the ethics and etiquette of their own particular cultures are subordinate to the ethics and manners appropriate to those who also are members of the Kingdom of God, whatever their culture. The worldview of that Kingdom shapes and changes how they approach and evaluate the worldview of their earthly kingdoms and what they consider good and bad conduct. One of the issues we cannot avoid is the challenge that elements of the Christian worldview present to the elements of the cultural and civilizational worldviews that surround us. There is tension between what our cultures and contexts consider good conduct and what the Kingdom of God considers good conduct.

This is not to say that Christians will look and act the same way in all human cultures and traditions.² The gospel is incarnated within human languages and cultures. It takes on the cultural clothing of the people who carry Christian faith. However, there are some very real common biblical convictions that critique all human cultures and customs. Christian faith is transformative, not only of individual lives, but also of culture itself. Therefore, we may expect to find some broad agreement about fundamental ethical notions among Christians, even while they may differ in terms of how those are applied in each different culture. We also know that God is pleased to start with us wherever we are, with our language, our culture, our social system and traditions. However, God never leaves us where God finds us.

Preparing to examine moral questions in social situations means first to understand the sort of world in which we live and our part in that world. That is a worldview question. We find answers to these questions, first and foremost, in the Bible. We want to take a quick overview of Scripture in terms of the various ways its parts speak to the human condition and ethics. This is where we begin our quest.

² Bernard Adeney, *Strange Virtues: Ethics in a Multicultural World*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995, gives a clear account of how Christian ethics works within very different cultural contexts – as well as the difficulties we have assessing the validity of ethics in other cultures.

II. The Christian Story and What God Has Said

This large sweep of the biblical narrative (story) is the framework for Christian ethics. It is our story as Christians. It provides some basic answers to worldview questions, giving us foundational beliefs about the world and ourselves in that world. It describes what God has done in Creation and in human history. It is the story of the mighty acts of God—Creation, the disobedience of Adam and Eve, the judgment of God, the calling and blessing of Abraham, the building of the nation of Israel, the judgment of Israel when it fell into idolatry and injustice, the exile and return, the coming of the Messiah, the beginning and growth of the early Church and finally the great revelation of Jesus Christ given to the Elder John in the last book of the Bible. This story allows us to create a basic framework of what God is about, the meaning of our world and how we fit into it.

Within that larger story and all its components, we also discover God speaking to us. Each of the major sections of the Bible provides a distinctive contribution to our understanding of Christian life and conduct. We want to see if we can outline what is distinctive in all parts of the Bible as a foundation and context for thinking Christianly about ethical conduct and character.

God speaks in special ways in each of the major sections of Scripture. If we examine the Bible, we can discern some of the most significant Words God speaks throughout the entirety of Scripture. We can ask how each Word contributes a key resource to Christian ethics. These are what we can call major bodies of God's spoken revelation, each strategically significant in providing key elements that impact how Christians think ethically. Together with the narrative story of God's mighty acts, they provide the key elements of a Christian worldview that undergird Christian ethics. The following are the eight Words that we will sketch:

1. The Word of Creation, blessing and curse (Genesis 1-3);
2. The Word of promise to bless all nations (Genesis 12-21);
3. The Word of law to shape a redemptive community (Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy);
4. The Word of testimony of people in the redemptive community (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs);
5. The Word of prophetic judgment and hope on a disobedient people of the redemptive community (Isaiah-Malachi);
6. The Word of the Gospels concerning the Messiah and the coming of the Kingdom of God (Matthew-John);
7. The Word of witness, demonstrating and explaining the meaning of Christ and the Kingdom (Acts-Jude);
8. The Word of vision, the revelation of the final things (Revelation).

1. God Speaks the World Into Being: *the Word of Creation, Blessing and Curse* (Genesis 1-3)

One repeated phrase in Genesis 1 is "let there be" (1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 25) and its associated phrase "and it was so." Our world has its source and meaning in God. This word ("let there be") is a word of permission and command, bringing the good world into being. Along with this Word God also speaks a word of naming ("God called") and blessing (1:5, 8, 10, 22, 28-30) and an evaluative comment on what is created—"God saw that it was good..." (1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). These repetitions point to the foundational realities that surround us. What is real—the world, seen and unseen, that God created!

The world as created was a blessed, good world. It was a world where God's purposes and humanity's fulfillment were possible. We learn that whatever is now evil or wrong (and thus cursed), comes not from the hand of the Creator. The curse comes in response to the sin of Adam and Eve. Unfortunately, the blessing is counterbalanced with a curse that has fallen on humanity and Creation due to the entrance of evil. Christian ethics views the world as good but afflicted by the curse.

We are not told much about the details of Creation other than that it comes from the hand of God. However, that means humans cannot look at nature and pretend it is a plaything of technology or simply a resource to be plundered by a profit-driven industry. The natural world, for all its germs and nasty things, is not simply a world of sin, shadowy evil or illusion. It is a world of goodness, blessed by God.

The end of the story in redemption climaxes in a material world with material bodies. The physical universe is not erased in a spiritual redemption that sucks the "spirits" out of everything, taking us into an ethereal, incorporeal world. Ethics is about this world, a material and real world that God created and will re-create in a new heavens and new earth on which the redeemed will dwell.

For some Christians, Creation is so well structured and apparent that the knowledge of "nature" grounds ethics as well as law. This is known as the "natural law" tradition, using an approach shared with some others (such as the Greek Stoics and parts of Sunni Islam). Natural law goes back to the Greeks who considered everything to have its own "nature." This nature of things persists since the gods shaped

the world in terms of eternal ideas or forms. The nature of each thing was its “logos,” its “reason” that could be comprehended by human reason.

Medieval Christian thought followed this line of reasoning, though they identified the Creator with the God of the Bible. Thomas Aquinas thought human reason could discern the eternal law God built into Creation and thus approach divine law, though not perfectly. Our knowledge of that eternal law needed to be supplemented by revealed law.

St. Thomas thought unaided human reason discerns the four cardinal ethical virtues: prudence, temperance, justice and fortitude. These are binding on all humans and provide the basis for judging socially and culturally created laws (positive or human laws). All humans sense these four virtues. We find them expressed across many cultures and religions. But they need to be supplemented by the theological virtues, known only through revelation: faith, hope and love. Yet many Protestants are not sure that human reason is so clear-sighted in a fallen world.³ So there are many Protestants not following the natural law tradition in ethics and law.

What Protestants have emphasized at times are the “created orders.” By this means that we can see God as establishing the basic structures of human social life such as family, the church, the state and the economy. Each has its own sphere of responsibility in fostering the good of Creation and human life. Each has its own limited freedom and value within the wholeness of human life and history. This is a variant of the natural law tradition. It has been used especially by Lutherans and Dutch Calvinists as a way of thinking systematically about ethical issues in our social worlds.

Part of our challenge in ethics is separating what is “natural” (and good) from what is now “fallen but still natural.” Disease and genetic distortions have penetrated the physical world. We no longer exist in Eden where we are in full communion with God and our moral conduct is irreproachable. We are in a *fallen world*. The physical world itself groans for redemption. In some powerful and deep way, the disobedience of human beings changed the structures and dynamics of the universe, not just those of human nature. Life has fallen under a curse.

It is not always easy to distinguish what is natural and blessed by God from what is an expression of the fall and thus cursed. Some ethical debates turn on this very distinction—is a same-sex orientation “natural” or “fallen?” Is “being gay” something God makes and blesses as “natural” (as many gays would say)⁴, or is it a broken and fallen expression of human sexual identity? Is the male and female Creation of Adam and Eve a creation order that tells us for all time what God’s design is for sexuality and mutuality?

It is clear that Scripture appeals to Creation’s intentions, to what is “natural,” in order to qualify later ethical realities and commands given to regulate behavior in a fallen world. **Creation serves as an ethical ideal.** Note Jesus’ use of Creation to qualify Moses’ permission to divorce (Matthew 19:8—“from the beginning it was not so”). Paul appeals to Creation and its structures to settle a number of ethical issues (in Romans 1 and I Corinthians 11). Creation serves as an ethical “ideal” since our own current existence is a departure from that original intention. Some of the laws that we find given in Scripture are in response “to the hardness” of our hearts, not because they express the original will of the Creator.

Despite these complexities Christian ethics must repeat the words God says over Creation: “let it be” and “it is good!” We must say of ourselves and our world: “let it be” and “it is good!” Christian ethics can never be an ethics of escape from Creation or a denigration of the good gifts built into a physical world. We are to enjoy and steward this good earth. Destroying Creation is an offence against the Creator. Christian ethics is not fully Christian if it does not care for Creation.

In addition, Christian ethics must be an ethics of blessing, joy and gratitude, even in a fallen world, or it is no longer Christian. When it becomes a grim, legalistic, “if-it-is-enjoyable-it-must-be-wrong” ethic, it has departed from the reality of Creation as God made it and blessed it. Finally, Creation serves as an ethical ideal within a larger Christian ethic. We will have more to say on this later.

Think About It

Answer Box # 3

Think about your own culture and the Christian church in that culture. How significant of an emphasis has there been on Creation—on the created order and care for creation? What is the view of Creation in your context?

³ Later on we will deal in more detail with the “natural law” tradition as a means of thinking ethically.

⁴ John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, 4th Edition (Zondervan, 2006) pp. 461-62 deals with this assertion. Ethics For Living and Leading, Version 3.0

2. God Speaks to Abraham and Makes a Covenant: *The Promise*

(Genesis 12:2-3; 13:14-17; 15:1-21; 17:1-22//21:1)

The New Testament identifies the Word God speaks to Abraham as “the promise.” When one examines the communication of God to Abraham, the repeated phrase is in the form of a promise for the future (thirty-six times we have the phrase, “*I will...*”). God promises to do something for Abraham. Abraham is asked to put his trust in the promise of God as reliable and sure. A promise expects faith in the one who makes the promise. Abraham is asked to put his faith in the promise of God—“I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you.” (Genesis 12:2)

In the very beginning of the story of redemption, *what God does for us* is given priority over *what we must do in response*. Before ethics comes grace. Later Paul will note that the promise comes *before* the law (Galatians 3:17). Throughout Scripture priority is given to God’s actions for us before we shape our own human conduct in response to God. Paul’s letters are often structured so that the first part of the letter is about what God has done in Creation and redemption, and the second part of his letter is then what God requires of us in our conduct and character. First salvation, then sanctification. First redemption, then ethics. First the promise, then the law.

Thus, Christian ethics always comes after grace. Without grace first and throughout, Christian ethics makes no sense. First God blesses us, and only then can we become a blessing. Christian ethics is the ethics of grace. However, even with this word of grace and promise comes the ethical demand—“I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless” (Genesis 17:1). The covenant of grace, calling Abraham, includes the demand to live in a way that has spiritual and ethical integrity.

In addition, we learn from this that *God’s means of extending salvation is a redeemed people.* God’s plan for redemption is to create a great, just and ethical nation. The ethical shape of their lives, their walk with God and imaging of God is central to the plan of redemption. Throughout the rest of the Old Testament we will learn that Israel has been set aside to be a light to the nations. This people’s life is to be an example and model of the life that pleases God. Because the people display a certain quality of life, they will be a blessing to all the earth. How then does that life individually and together as a community look?

3. God Speaks at Sinai: *Law*

(Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy):

When people think of Christian ethics, they normally think of the Ten Words or Commandments (Exodus 20). However, more is present than simply the broad instructions and imperatives of the Ten Commandments. In fact, there are two sorts of verbal phrases used to communicate God’s will.

- a). **Apodictic** laws: these use a “command” formula—“You shall not...you shall not...you shall not...you shall...” These are a variety of imperatives, words that are spoken as demand and claim on Israel. These words set boundaries, mark out avenues of action and attitude, command specific behavior or ban certain sorts of ways of being in the world. For example: “You shall not steal” (Exodus 20:15).
- b). **Case** laws: these are conditional rules. Note Exodus 21—“When you do X...then Y...; if someone experiences G...then you shall respond with H...” These are given in the following form: “If such and such happens, then you shall do the following.” It specifies what should be done in specific cases. These are imperatives, but they are about how to handle specific cases or instances and are also known as “casuistic” or “conditional” law. For example,

God’s speaking at Sinai is a matter of giving principles, commands, imperatives—elements of ethical instruction that are quite direct and spell out boundaries for life in a fallen world. The “law” (and Christian ethics) has to do with conduct, standards of action and rules of life and conduct. It gives God’s prescriptions and proscriptions about how the Israelites are to frame their lives and relationships. This is what they are to do and what they are not to do. In the law we have the instructions for the society and the relationships Israel is to display.

Rules and principles have always been a basic part of ethical guidance in the Christian world as well as in other traditions. However, they are a given *after* an account of what God has done as Creator and Redeemer. First God delivers Israel. Only then does the “law” (or “instruction”—Torah means instruction) come. This ordering is expressed very nicely at the very beginning of the Ten Commandments.

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.... (Exodus 20:2)

The law is not a substitute for God’s gracious act of salvation by grace alone. It is an expression of the life God has freed us to live. Its importance will be spelled out when we look at the Ten Words (“Commandments”) given to Moses in a later unit.

Think About It

Answer Box # 4

Think about your own culture and the Christian church in that culture. How significant of an emphasis has there been on rules or laws as the way to decide what is right or wrong?

4. God Speaks Through the Writings: *the Testimony*

(Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes)

A body of writings is associated with the time of the fullest development of the nation of Israel, when Israel was a fully functioning, unified nation. The common features of these documents are the inner heart expressions of people who are attempting to live by faith (as Abraham did in response to God's promises) and obedience (as Israel did in response to the giving of the law at Sinai). This body of writing answers the following questions: What is life like for the people of God living in Israel? How do people feel when they walk by faith and obedience? What responses do these people have as they attempt to live in an ethically responsible manner in a fallen and difficult world?

Three of these books are classified as wisdom literature. They are instructional, with two offering speculative wisdom (Job, Ecclesiastes) and one proverbial (Proverbs). Psalms is a collection of hymns and songs, responding to God's actions, inaction and revelations. The Song of Songs is a collection of love songs between a man and a woman. In these writings we have the personal words of people who seek to live before God in all the circumstances of life. These are the inner heart responses and summary insights of God's people as they have trusted God and sought to conform their living patterns to God's will. Through their examples we can see the importance of a theology of Creation. They appeal to Creation to make sense of this world and to decide how to live well in it.

Numerous literary forms or genres are used—literary drama (Job), texts of songs used in worship and national liturgy (Psalms), advice to young people (Proverbs), philosophical-poetic memoir (Ecclesiastes) and poetic dialogue in song of lovers (Song of Songs). In all five books we have the inner attitudes, motives, insights and feelings of the people of God put into words. In this case the Word of God comes to us through these recorded human responses to all the challenges and cycles of life. The New Testament picks up passages from these works and asserts that the Holy Spirit speaks through them.

This part of the Bible provides a practical and prudential approach to life. Laws and rules do not always give us the complete guidance we need. It is not always clear which rules apply and whether there are exceptions as we face the complexities of life. We need to calculate possible outcomes of behavior and be wise in our choices. Ethics is not only about rules but also about the results of our conduct. It is also about the feelings and passions that rise up within us, even when we don't want them. It is about being real and practical as we live by faith and obedience. These writings give us words to express our longings, frustrations, disappointments, joys and puzzlings.

The wisdom literature urges us to become wise in our choices and behavior and to choose our conduct considering what will produce good results. Wisdom also pushes us to consider our character, the abiding tendencies we have built into ourselves by our past conduct. Often the theology behind our decisions is not that of the law but rather of Creation—seeing the world in which we live and how it works, we choose to act this or that way. Common experience often provides guidance in making good choices and helps us see where the rules apply and, at times, do not apply. *These are very practical books.*

These books also show the ethical importance of the inner feelings and motives of God's people as they walk by faith and obedience. The intentions and feelings behind or beneath our decisions and conduct are an important part of being an ethical or moral person. We are encouraged by these books because, as we listen to the words of their authors, we recognize our own experiences in theirs. Their testimonies about living and leading correspond to ours. Sometimes we are stunned by the frankness and bluntness of their words. They say things to God we can hardly believe. They puzzle over things that we are embarrassed to admit puzzle us. They are not so spiritual that they become unrealistic and impractical about life and its challenges. Even faithful people find things in their experience that are mysterious and difficult.

Each book of the Writings contributes something different. We must relate to the larger world and history that surround us—to the practical realities that are immediately next to us and at our feet (Proverbs). We must deal with what is barely perceptible or knowable, be it the mystery of who governs

this difficult world with its seemingly senseless suffering (Job), or the ambiguities of what we should value in this life (Ecclesiastes). Our relationship with God is explored in a torrent of poetry and prayer (Psalms). Then there is physical passion, the mighty "flame of God" (Song of Songs 8:6): erotic love. The powers and passions of *eros* are expanded upon in terms of how married love should feel (Song of Songs).

The tone and voice of the speaker in these books is very different than in the other books of the Old Testament. In these books we have the calm comments of the teacher (Proverbs), the anguished questions of the suffering believer (Job), the weary angst of the wildly successful and wise saint (Ecclesiastes), the passionate praises of male and female lovers (Song of Songs) and the worship, praise, lament and queries of the praying believer, seeking the face and favor of the living God (Psalms). These writings put a living, breathing human face on the struggles we confront as we seek to live and lead with ethical integrity.

Think About It

Answer Box # 5

What role does "wisdom" play in your culture and context in helping decide what is right or wrong? How does that correspond to the Bible's emphasis on the importance of human experience in making sense of standards for living well?

5. God Speaks Through the Prophets: *Judgment and Hope*

(Isaiah-Malachi)

The prophets provide the clearest and most concentrated expression of God speaking to God's *disobedient* children. This Word comes with the repeated phrases, "thus says the Lord," "a word that X saw," "an oracle concerning," or "the vision of." The prophets are those who speak for the Lord in a direct manner. We have a grand revelation of the righteous and loving God, speaking to a redemptive community that has rejected the ethical and moral shape of life given by God's prior instructions.

The prophets speak to the disobedient people of God. These are the people God has elected and called into fellowship. God has brought them out of slavery and made covenant with them at Mt. Sinai—carried them into the promised land. God has freed them in order that they might live responsibly before God and with their neighbors. Now they have turned aside from the relationship. They do not trust and no longer obey God. However, they continue to go through all the religious motions of sacrifice and still claim the identity as the people of the great and living God. This is a Word that rebukes two great ethical sins, idolatry and injustice.

The prophets show us how God deals with this tragic and terrible situation. The prophetic writings also have predictive elements in them (foretelling the coming Kingdom of God and the Messiah). However, the largest portion of the prophets is not prediction but exhortation and entreaty. In the process we have a grand reiteration of God's intention to bring the blessing of salvation to *all nations*, not just to Israel. The Prophets also offer us one of the most graphic and powerful revelations of the character of God. If the Writings are a display of the heart of humans who are seeking to walk in trust and obedience, the prophets are a display of the broken heart of God when they break covenant with God. Consider Hosea.

Hosea felt the burden of his message because of his own tragic experience with his wife Gomer (and possibly with a second wife). It is the great shout of wounded love—a compassionate God crying out against the idolatry and political alliances of Israel. Israel (the northern Kingdom) was entangled in various intrigues and turmoil leading up to Assyria's carrying Israel into exile. As Hosea vividly reveals, the words of the prophets are the words of a wounded, loving God who has been mistreated and cast aside by God's own people. The word that comes through the prophets is the anguished cry of a betrayed lover. Two primary emphases are repeated again and again in the Prophets.

- a) There is a word of judgment for "this present day," rebuking the sins of God's people and calling them to repentance (Isaiah 1:2-9; 58:1-7; Jeremiah 2:9-13; 3:6-10; Micah 1:2-7; Malachi 1:2-2:3). Judgment is announced because of the moral and ethical misconduct of God's people. The two great evils can be summarized as idolatry and injustice. In Christian ethics, our first obligation and duty is to God ("love God with all your heart"). Idolatry violates that relationship in the most fundamental manner. To allow rivals to our loyalty and trust in the living God is to do the highest injustice in the universe.

There is also a second cluster of sins that have to do with injustice to our fellow humans (“love your neighbor as yourself”). The prophets consistently point out the ways in which Israel has not created families and communities that mirror the love and justice of God. Instead, the powerful oppress the weak. The rich defraud the poor. The king and nobles foster corruption and extortion. The priests do not protect the holiness of Israel’s ways. Prophets encourage the leadership in their evil, proclaiming as the Word of the Lord their own imaginings. The people of the land practice extortion, mistreat the foreigner and commit robbery (Ezekiel 22). Instead of creating a social world that is a light to the nations, Israel has become no different than the nations that do not know the Lord.

In thinking about the ethical paradigms of the Old Testament, the prophets (whose primary duty is to announce the Word of the Lord) remind Israelites of their primary duties. While all are to enact justice, to be holy in life, to be wise in word and decision and to foster life and hospitality, people in different positions are reminded of their central duties. The king is judged on the basis of decisions and conduct that create justice in principle and in practice. The priests are measured by their protection and propagation of holiness. The sages or teachers are viewed in terms of nurturing wisdom and understanding. The people of the land are evaluated on how they foster life through their use of the land and how they extend hospitality to the poor and the stranger. The prophets interpret the law and provide insight into the weightier things of the law and how God wants more than just conformity to religious rituals.

- b) Joined with the announcement of judgment is a *word of hope* where the prophet describes “**that coming day**” in the future when God will redeem and restore his errant people (Isaiah 60:1-7; Jeremiah 3:11-14; Micah 4:1-8; Malachi 4:1-5). The disobedient people of God are invited to repent and believe the good news: God’s Kingdom will triumph in the future through the coming of a True Leader who will be faithful. God remains faithful to his people even in judgment. God does not abandon his purpose to bless all families of the earth through the family he has chosen to be a priest to the nations and a light to the world.

To be sure, there is more in the prophets than this short summary. However, this will have to suffice for our purposes. The prophets are “covenant enforcers.” They remind the people of God of the committed relationship they share with the living God. They insist on the seriousness of the people of God’s responsibility to live lives that image the life and character of God. Next to the Torah (“the law”), this part of the Bible is most directly “ethical” in its content. It is focused on the requirements of life with God and the consequences for the people of God when they violate their relationship with God and their neighbor. These are prophets of the ethical!

Think About It

Answer Box # 6

Think about your context. What role do sins of idolatry and injustice play in everyday life?

Why do you think there is such a strong reaction to idolatry? What roles do the gods/goddesses we serve play in the ethics of life, whether or not we are Christian?

6. God Speaks Through Jesus Christ: *The Good News of the Kingdom of God* (Matthew-John)

The four gospels are a narrative account of the life, words, works and death of Jesus of Nazareth. They are ancient forms of what we moderns call biographies. They tell of the origins, deeds, relationships, words, and fate of a particular individual. They are also the definitive Word that God speaks to us.

In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom

he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.
(Hebrews 1:1-2)

This is a biographical, narrative account of the life, words and actions of a spiritual leader in a small Roman province. It includes accounts of those who were his inner disciples as well as the typical responses of a wide range of his contemporaries. It is history in that the accounts present themselves as based upon eye-witness testimony and memory (Luke 1:1-4). However, it is not simply history. The Writings tell the story with the intent that we also respond appropriately to Jesus as the risen and now living Lord of the Universe.

The books include those things the writers considered important to know or remember about this man, Jesus of Nazareth, who died at the hands of Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. Most of it is narrative and captured in action verbs—Jesus went, Jesus said, Jesus answered, Jesus was going, Jesus came, Jesus taught, Jesus took her hand and helped her up, Jesus got up and prayed, Jesus, filled with compassion, reached out his hand, etc.

The most startling thing in this semi-biographical history is the claim (delivered partly through amazing capabilities and partly through direct teaching) that this human is the sovereign Creator God come to live as a human being among us. This is a public claim. The Gospels are a four-fold witness growing out of the network of eyewitnesses who heard and saw what this man did and said. In this case the communication is *the identity and person of the Messianic prophet of God*, the one who brings the salvation promised in the Old Testament. It is a message that Jesus is God with us, reconciling us to God. He and he alone is the perfect human, the only one who has fully done the will of the Father on earth.

What does narrative do for us that other sorts of communication cannot do? It gives us concrete characters interacting with each other over a period of time (with a beginning, middle and an ending). In this kind of communication we find we are invited to identify with some or one of the characters and to see analogies between our lives and the lives and issues involved in the narrative story. It is a more indirect way of communicating than direct address (such as law). However, narrative is frequently more powerful because it elicits a deeper process of reflection about life, other people and God.

Narrative allows models or paradigms of the proper life to be shown. **Jesus is the definitive model of the ethical and moral life.** To put it another way—**he is the way** as well as the life and the truth. (John 16:4) His conduct and character were perfect expressions of the perfect will of God. We learn by “watching” him in action. Much of ethics is “caught” not “taught.” Narrative is a powerful way of characterizing situations and decisions, indirectly leading us to understand what proper conduct looks like in real life. However, there is more to the Gospels than the narrative of Jesus’ actions.

The Gospels also tell us what he said. When we look at the words that occur after the terms of speaking (Jesus says, said, spoke, taught, proclaimed...), then we find the full range words we have found before, from fiat (creational) utterances that command nature into submission (sight out of blindness, wholeness out of leprosy, life out of death), promises (I will...), law (I say to you...), the language of testimony and wisdom (wisdom, prayers, inner heart disclosures) and prophetic words (denunciations of the sins of the present and announcements of coming judgment and vindication). Jesus uses the full range of prior words from God as he speaks the Word of the Lord to us.

When we consider the *content* of what Jesus taught (Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:15; Luke 4:43), we can summarize his prime teaching as “the Kingdom of God.” He calls for repentance and faith in the light of the nearness (or arrival) of the Kingdom of God. This is *good news* because it signals the arrival of the definitive action of God against sin and all its results. God’s salvation for the universe and for human beings is now inaugurated in a new and final way.

We have to acknowledge that the Kingdom of God has been understood and interpreted in a variety of ways, not all of them responsive to the multi-dimensional nature of that Kingdom. In brief compass we may say the Kingdom of God refers to *the undisputed sovereignty of God in Creation, established and expressed in a complete order of peace, justice and righteousness on a new earth within a new heavens.*

This entirely future new world comes in its unearthly powers at the climax of this age at the Day of the Lord. This is a Day of judgment and rectification when all the enemies of Christ are fully made his footstool. No inch of space nor second of time will have room for decisions, relationships or actions that are not fully conformed to the direct will of God. All those who are aligned with evil along with the evil One will be banished from God’s presence (Kingdom). The abundance of eternal life and healing portrayed at the end of the book of Revelation will permeate the whole of the created universe. In this present age it is already here, hidden and humble. However, one day it will come in a visible and fully triumphant manner when Jesus returns to earth to rule as King of Kings.

Jesus taught the reality of this Kingdom. In passages like the Sermon on the Mount he spelled out the ethical demands of that coming Kingdom. We are brought into the reality of that Kingdom, entering it by repentance. Once part of that Kingdom, we now live according to its values and laws. **Ethics are the ethics of the Kingdom of God.**

Ethically speaking, the Gospels give us *the great demonstration of a righteous life*. They also give us the definitive interpretation of the law and the prophets, crystallizing and focusing for us the central

elements of a life that is pleasing to God. Jesus provides us with the fullest revelation of God's will for Creation and human living within Creation. We will have time in a later unit to examine the Sermon on the Mount as an example of Jesus' ethical instruction.

7. God Speaks Through the Apostles: *Witness to Life in Union with Christ*

(Acts, Romans-Jude)

The book of Acts is the historical preface to the letters written mostly by apostles, most of whom are introduced in Acts. The recipients of the letters are most often from locations described in Acts. Therefore, Acts provides the context and narrative story that shows the transition from Israel as the people of God to the Church as the new people of God, with both Jews and Gentiles as full partners.

As we watch the early spread of the Church westward in the Roman Empire, we see the Apostles giving witness to their changed life in Christ. They speak and proclaim a specific word. It is the two-fold message of Jesus the Messiah and the Kingdom of God. While Jesus declared the Kingdom of God, the apostolic witness adds teaching and preaching about Jesus to that basic message.

The blessings God brings to us through God's redemptive activity find their focus in Jesus Christ, the one who is the way, the truth and the life. The apostolic witnesses repeatedly conclude that God has borne witness to the significance of Jesus in redemptive and global history. By raising Jesus from the dead, God has set him to be the Judge of the living and the dead. At present all are invited to acknowledge him as Lord and so take up a proper relationship to him, living in the light and power of the coming Kingdom of God.

In the letters and epistles, we have personal letters of explanation, exhortation and appeal. We may characterize them as *the witness of companionship*. God talks to this new group of Jewish and Gentile believers by using the words of older, more experienced Christian leaders, especially apostles. They write to instruct, encourage and persuade, but not as big bosses. This is not a method of dictatorship, ruling by command and imperative. It is a humble approach of companionship, coaching and mentoring. The ethics of the Kingdom are communicated and instilled by mentoring and modeling.

The writers of these letters are older Christ-followers who have been called by God to become fellow disciples and companions of these younger Christians. They use a method of mentoring and companionship. These older Christians who have experienced living in union with Christ now write to fellow Christians. In these letters, Paul and others reason their way through issues to show both the way they think about things and the reasonable, faith-based grounds upon which issues ought to be settled. Their method is one of persuasion and less frequently of command. They seek to persuade on the basis of the Old Testament, the example and teaching of Christ and the necessary implications of salvation by grace.

We cannot think of the apostolic literature as a reasoned response to all matters that will face the people of God through the centuries. The Church moves across a vast array of cultures and time as it spreads the Word, living in the light of the cross and resurrection and waiting for Christ to return. We need to know how to approach the issues that we face. Through the example and the reasoning, the letters suggest how we think about everything in the light of the reality of Jesus Christ in order to live faithfully. Having a method to think Christianly allows us to transfer the content and direction of these occasional letters into our lives and cultures.

These are occasional letters, that is, they are written to specific people who find themselves in specific situations where they need to learn appropriate Christian thought and behavior. Something has occurred among a group of Christians that motivates the apostle to respond by addressing the issues of that occasion. The letters are a form of mentoring in which a more mature and discerning Christian aids the less mature. In some cases the persons being counseled and advised are the converts or even co-workers of the letter writer(s). We might think of them as early "case studies" in applying Jesus' way to unique situations and problems.

The focus of the letters is an explanation of the nature of the Christian life—its roots in the person and work of Christ; its outworking in the gifts and graces of the Spirit of God; its expression in the community that constitutes the social network of life in Christ, in the acceptance of Jew and Greek, male and female, bond and free, strong and weak within the inner circle of fellowship; and its dynamic in the sharing of Christ's life and love.

It deals with the issue of integrity—what we believe, what we say, what we do. All three are to be bound together in a unity that is appropriate to the fact that we are now participants of the Kingdom of God, that we name Jesus as the mediator between us and God. What we believe (doctrine) and how we live (ethics) interact in a mutually reciprocal manner. We are now "in" Christ, bound so closely to him that we become his body on earth. What we do is now done in union with Christ who is our very life.

Repeatedly we have appeals to both the Old Testament and to the meaning of Jesus the Messiah on how members of the Christian community are to think, believe, relate and live. This communication by correspondence contains more than the practical matters of the life Christians share. However, the major items addressed again and again have to do with the worldview, attitudes, practices, virtues and life

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together that are to typify the Christian person, family and believing community. In addition, they also describe the opposite—the vices that are to be eliminated from the Christian community.

In many ways these letters show us the implications of the life and teachings of Jesus for practical living. They serve as a model of ethical instruction and spell out some of the details of what it will mean to live in union with Jesus Christ. They are the final *major* body of revelation, instructing us in terms of Christian ethics. In seeing how union with Christ worked in the Greco-Roman world among these early Christ-followers, we learn how we are to think and live in our own time and culture.

Perhaps we can characterize the significant contribution of the Epistles to the ethical instruction of the Bible in this way. There is a shift in *emphasis or focus* that can be discerned as follows:

- *Outward behavior*: You shall not murder (Exodus)—deontological or **rule-based focus**;
- *Inward attitude*: Anger with brother or sister subjects us to the judgment (Sermon on Mount)— **motive focus**;
- *The root of sin*: Put off the old person who is angry and put on the new (Epistles)—**character focus**.

To some extent the shift is from the form of the Old Testament law and its concern with rule conformity, to the clarification of its intent in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (the motive-intent of action), to the thrust of the Epistles (the nature of the actor, the complete inner renovation of our very personhood). This is a matter of emphasis and focus, for there are elements of all in all three parts of the Bible. Nevertheless, the thrust or emphasis shifts from a deontological to a virtue ethic without denying the role of rules and motives.

a) The moral and spiritual **standards** remain the same, but the way in which they are expressed and focused changes.

b) All ethical realities are now **related to Christ**. The Old Testament tells us not to commit adultery. The Sermon on the Mount says not to look and lust in our heart. I Corinthians 5-6 deal with sexuality by connecting it to the fact that we are joined to Christ.

Do you not know that your bodies are member of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body, but the fornicator sins against the body itself. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body. (I Corinthians 6:15, 18-20).

c) The **power or capability** is spelled out as the indwelling Christ by the Spirit. "It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20). This power to live comes from the inner connection with Christ that we actively foster and sustain.

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. ...For in [Christ] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority... (Colossians 2:6-7, 9-10)

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts....let the word of Christ dwell in you richly... (Colossians 3:15,16).

Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. (Galatians 5:16)

The focus moves deeper than simply motives to a whole new person, a renovated character.

Think About It

Answer Box # 7

How much of the ethics of your church is grounded in the teachings found in the Epistles and Letters of the New Testament? As you think about the teaching and preaching in your church, would you say that you get a "balanced diet" of ethical instruction, given what you know about the variety of Words God gives us?

8. God Speaks Through Revelation: *The Vision of Final Things*

(Revelation)

The end of the Bible contains the visions of John recorded in the book of Revelation. A veil is removed from the invisible world of the heavens (where God dwells beyond time and space) and from the misty, unknown future of creation.

Revelation alone shows us in graphic and dynamic symbols the triumph of redemption. It is the final answer to the cry for liberation and deliverance that we find all through the Bible. It is, as are all the New Testament books, centered on Jesus Christ, but the focus and message shifts. The consummation of history and the purposes of Creation and redemption are now in view.

- The ground or **basis of the consummation** (just as the beginning of all things) is the Lamb, slain from before the foundation of the earth. Jesus Christ as the one who died on Calvary is the final arbiter of creation.
- The **occasion and agent of consummation** is Jesus Christ, appearing the second time as the Judge of all the earth and all flesh, the Warrior-Messiah, King of Kings who ends all opposition to the rule of God.
- The **nature of the world and history** that surrounds us is unveiled as the great conflict between God and Satan with all their allies.
- This **coming of Jesus to accomplish the consummation** will involve terrible suffering and judgments. It is only at this time that the presence of evil and evil-doers will be fully revealed. This will be the separation between the wheat and the tares, the clean and unclean fish, the sheep and the goats (described by Jesus in his parables).
- The **goal of consummation** is restoration. All of creation will be restored to its intended purpose and processes so that God's will will be done "on earth as it is in heaven." The final state will be like a great city in which people from all races, tribes, languages and tongues dwell together with God in a state of "shalom" (perfect harmony, justice, love and peace).

This is a great revelation of the person of Jesus Christ, exalted in the heavenly places with Father and Spirit, surrounded and served by the angelic hosts. The content, insofar as it is a revelation of Jesus Christ, is focused in two metaphors, Jesus as Lamb of God and as the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Concentrated in those two images are summaries of the first and second comings of Immanuel. In the first, God's Son came in weaknesses (as a Lamb), in the humble form of a servant who suffered and died on the cross as God's perfect sacrifice to take away the sin of the world. In the second event, God's Son comes as the triumphant victory of God over all evil and opposition to the sovereign rule of God in a restored Creation (as the Lion).

This is a great revelation by Jesus Christ, who received it from God and shows it to his servants. It is a revelation of **things that must shortly come to pass**. In that sense this is the testimony or witness given by the exalted Christ to John. John himself then becomes the mediator and authenticator of what he has seen and heard to the seven churches and to us who read the text many centuries later. It is about more than the revelation of the person of Jesus. It is about the texture of the history that constitutes the final things along with the events, actors and relationships involved in leading up to the final things.

The message of the book is that Christians are to be ready for the coming of Christ and the consummation of all things. Live now in the light of the coming reality of the triumph of Jesus Christ in all creation and in the light of the fact that the time for that event is not indefinitely distant. In the light of the coming triumph of God in all the earth, be faithful to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.

This is the response to which we are driven by the end of the book. It is the response we already found in the Gospels and the Epistles. Both of these earlier writings are also eschatological⁵ in their outlook. The age to come has already arrived in a hidden and humble form. We already partake of the powers of that age by the Spirit and wait for the unveiling (the *parousia*) of Jesus Christ as triumphant Lord and Judge of all flesh.

The ethics of Jesus' teaching as well as the ethics of Paul and other New Testament writers are eschatological. They are rooted in the reality and certainty of the final things. Revelation does not offer us something qualitatively new. It dramatizes and makes vivid the final things. In its symbols and the movement of its narrative, we are able to experience a more intense, brilliant and expressive account of what is in store for us. They urge us to endure patiently because of the hope we have in the certainty and reality of these coming things.

More specifically, there is a repeated refrain stressing the "keeping" of the prophecy.

⁵ Refers to the part of theology concerned with death, judgment, and the final destiny of the soul and of humankind. (http://oxforddictionaries.com/view/entry/m_en_us1244846#m_en_us1244846.004, Accessed December 17, 2010.)

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- 1:3—Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who **keep** what is written in it; for the time is near.
- 3:10—Because you have **kept** my word of patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth.
- 12:17—Then the dragon was angry with the woman, and went off to make war on the rest of her children, those who **keep** the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus.
- 14:12—Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who **keep** the commandments of God and hold fast to the faith of Jesus.
- 22:7—See, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who **keeps** the words of the prophecy of this book.
- 22:9—but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your comrades the prophets, and with those who **keep** the words of this book. Worship God!”

What does it mean *to keep the words of the prophecy* of this book?

To “keep” normally refers to the observance of certain imperatives—staying within certain limits. Certainly in the Old Testament to keep covenant means to live within the stipulations and agreements that constitute that covenant. To keep an imperative is to obey its meaning and spirit. To keep a promise means to act in alignment with what has been guaranteed. To keep a prophecy is at least to live as *though what is described and foretold is definitive of reality*, even when it is not yet obvious to the senses within history.

To keep the word of patient endurance would mean to be patient and endure, even in situations of deathly danger and grave suffering. The rationale for such patient endurance is that we find ourselves here and now in a world that is hostile to the true dynamic and reality of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom is present already, and we participate in its power. Yet, it is present only in a hidden and humble way.

So we participate in its reality in the same manner as Jesus did—as people who are vulnerable to the attacks of the evil one and all those who do evil. We too may suffer and be martyred as was Jesus. We too may be persecuted and our families and possessions wiped out as has happened down through Church history. That hostility often comes as we carry forward the Great Commission and Commandment to be both witnesses to the ends of the earth and demonstrations of the character of God. So we may find ourselves in prison, as does this prophet John.

I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos *because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus*. (Revelation 1:9)

Patient endurance is necessary because of our vulnerability and the presence and perversity of evil despite the presence of the Kingdom of God. Patient endurance is possible because we have a sure and firm hope of the coming triumph of God in Christ. Revelation pulls back the veil on the hidden world of God’s activity and determined hostility toward evil and evildoers. We can see that those who persevere to the end, those whose robes have been washed in the blood of the Lamb, find themselves in the next world before the throne of God. They are acknowledged and embraced by the full goodness and blessing of God. Those who persecute the faithful children of God find themselves facing the full curse and wrath of God.

The visions of John contribute the motivating reality that enables us to persist to the very end, despite sorrows, suffering, opposition, threats and difficulties. They show us that the difficult and narrow path we must follow in ethical integrity and spiritual faithfulness is aligned with the destiny of all Creation. The Great Power of the universe walks with us and fights the battles in which we find ourselves. There is an enemy who is more powerful and subtle than all human sages and kings. However, we discover in the vision of John the reality that victory is on the side of justice, integrity, faithfulness, kindness, goodness, love and peace. The God of the universe asks from us only what aligns with the meaning and purpose of Creation and its destiny in a consummation of a new heavens and a new earth.

Present in this vision of John are seven “beatitudes” that hold out the reward that comes for those who pursue life with God and its transformation of motives, character and community. Ethics raises the question, what sort of life is truly happy, fully blessed with all the best that makes human life as full and abundant as it can be? What is the ideal or good life for human beings? Revelation answers it with seven beatitudes.

- a. 1:3—**Blessed** is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and **blessed** are those who hear and who keep what is written in it; for the time is near.
- b. 14:13—And I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Write this: **Blessed** are the dead who from now on die in the Lord. Yes,” says the Spirit, “they will rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them.”
- c. 16:15—See, I am coming like a thief! **Blessed** is the one who stays awake and is clothed, not going about naked and exposed to shame.

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- d. 19:9—And the angel said to me, “Write this: **Blessed** are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are true words of God.”
- e. 20:6—**Blessed** and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. Over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him a thousand years.
- f. 22:7—See, I am coming soon! **Blessed** is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.”
- g. 22:14—**Blessed** are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates.

With this we end our quick tour of the biblical materials where God speaks to us. We can **summarize** these eight “words” that we are given with the following chart and explanation:

The Word God Gives us from all of Scripture: inspired to equip us (2 Timothy 3:16-17)	
Creation	The great foundational ideal with blessing and curse
Promise	Ethics is rooted in grace , in what God first does, requiring <i>faith</i>
Law	Clear standards and principles of conduct, requiring <i>obedience</i>
Writings	Testimonies from all conditions of life, providing practical wisdom
Prophets	God’s response to disobedience —words of judgment and hope
Gospels	The definitive way we are to live, given in Jesus’ life and words and deeds
Apostle’s witness	Modeling and mentoring the ethics of the Kingdom and Jesus, in letters and personal presence
Revelation	The vision of final things that produces patient endurance when we are under pressure

1. The word of **Creation** tells us we live in a material world, created by God. It is a world of wondrous goodness and terrible evil. It exists under the blessing and curse of the God who made it. We have been given the mandate to be stewards of Creation as we live in a communion and companionship of male and female under the Lordship of God. Creation gives us *the great foundational ideal* out of which we find natural law and Creation order traditions in ethics.
2. By grace God has chosen a people to be God’s redemptive community through whom God will bring blessings to all families on earth. With the promise is also the demand to “walk before [God] faithfully and be blameless.” The **promise** shows us that ethics is rooted in *grace*, or it is not Christian ethics at all. Everything in Christian ethics begins first with what God has done and only then speaks of what we must do.
3. In the **law**, God has given commandments and rules meant to shape the way God’s redemptive community lives and acts in a fallen but blessed Creation. In this extended “instruction” (Torah) the redemptive community is shown what it means to be faithful and blameless in their walk before the Lord. Their calling is to bless all nations and families, to mediate the presence and person of the living God. They will do this partly by imaging the character of their God and values and nature of the coming Kingdom of God. God has given us *clear standards of conduct*, principles to follow as we seek to live ethically.
4. In the **Writings** we have the testimony of those who have embraced the promise and the commandments of God model the challenges of living a life of faith and obedience. Ethical integrity requires *practical wisdom*, deep spirituality, and a realistic grasp of the structures and processes of the world (both natural and social) that surround us. Being part of the redemptive community does not exempt us from suffering, mystery, puzzlement, difficulty, or the challenge of living with and managing complex and difficult people.
5. The **Prophets** remind us that the ethical and spiritual demands of the calling and covenant of God with his redemptive people are serious. Violating them brings the judgment of God. The two-fold love of God and love of neighbor summarize the ethical requirements of God. When we, God’s people, no longer exercise faith and ethical obedience but fall into idolatry and injustice, *judgment* will come. However, with it comes a promise of a new beginning.
6. The **Gospels** show us the definitive revelation of God’s will for the fully blessed human life in Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah. His life models ethical and moral perfection. His words give us the instruction

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we need to understand God's will. In him the promises and the law are given their fullest meaning and realization. His life and work, his words and sending of the Spirit enable us to live lives of holiness, justice and love. He recreates the redemptive community by initiating the Church within Israel by initiating the first arrival of the Kingdom of God in human history. He show us and speaks about the definitive Way we are to live ethically.

7. The **Apostles' witness** in the early Church movement gives testimony to Jesus and to the Kingdom of God. Their letters and epistles explain the meaning of Jesus and the Kingdom of God. That correspondence explores and models the reality of Jesus Christ and his Kingdom for many ethical and practical issues of life in the Church and in the larger community. From it we have the final ethical instructions for Christian living and leading. We also have the clearest indication that the Bible's ethical concern finally focuses on our personhood, the putting off of the old person and putting on of a new person, renewed by the Spirit in the image of Christ. Through modeling and mentoring, the Apostles and letter writers of the New Testament show how to apply the ethics of the Kingdom and Jesus.
8. The book of **Revelation** provides us with the vision of final things. It is a great revelation of the person and work of Jesus as the Lamb of God and Lion of the tribe of Judah. The present meaning of history is cloaked in the mystery of the heavenly struggle of the forces of evil against the High King of heaven. However, through the testimony of Jesus and the word of God, victory will come, but only through suffering and difficulty. In the meantime, we are exhorted to patient endurance as we keep faithfully to the will of God expressed in Creation, promise, law, testimony, prophetic utterance, the Gospels and the witness of the apostles.

III. Models: Abel

This is the first story of human life *outside the Garden of Eden*. Genesis 2-3 tells the story of Adam and Eve *inside* the garden. While sin begins inside the Garden, this story shows how sin increases outside it. The story in chapter 4 has many parallels with Genesis 2-3. Cain (the one "brought forth" by the mother of the living) acts out the serpent's purpose by murdering the "seed" of the woman, Eve. Adam and Cain have same occupation (2:15; 4:2); both are cursed (4:11; cf. 3:14, 17), and both are driven eastwards. Both of their sins relate to fruit (3:6; 4:3). The alienation from God and its resulting ethical disasters are repeated in different form. Cain's own anger and violence is magnified at the end of Genesis 4 in the words of Lamech, who imitates his ancestor by murdering the vulnerable (4:23-24).

A Model of Ethical Living: Abel—Obeying God's word (Genesis 4:1-16; Hebrews 11:4)

Read the above biblical texts before continuing below.

The story of Cain and Abel is a sad one. These two men, children of Adam and Eve, both brought sacrifices to God (Genesis 4:1-16). We read that God had respect for Abel and his offering but not for Cain and his offering. The assumption here is that Abel was making his sacrifice in obedience to God's word in a way that Cain was not (Hebrews 11:4). The apparent jealousy of Cain led him to murder his brother Abel, thus bringing God's judgment upon himself. We can analyze the way Abel lived as follows:

- His ethical **challenge**: to respect God's word.
- His ethical **action**: to make an appropriate sacrifice.
- His **temptation**: to follow his older brother, Cain, whose offering was not acceptable.
- The **cost** of doing what was right: the loss of his life.
- The **reward** of doing what was right: God's approval.

Think About It

Answer Box # 8

1. Have you experienced the tension between being asked to do what an older brother wanted and knowing that God wanted you to do something else? What did you do? How did you feel about your action? What might have happened if you had done the other thing?
2. Would you like to live differently in the future? If so, how?

This story is a window into the central ethical paradigm of the Old Testament—the *paradigm of the family*. A paradigm is a model or example for other cases where a basic theme or principle remains unchanged though the details differ.⁶ Paradigms provide a larger framework and set of beliefs about how things work. We can see how the story embodies the paradigm's abiding elements that are meant to be values and principles for all life in all cultures. Sometimes this is shown as a negative example and other times as a positive example.

The story of Abel does not underline all the elements in **the familial paradigm of the Old Testament**. We can summarize that family framework as involving *the preservation and continuation of life* (through the generations), *the provision of land and its produce* as central to the sustenance of the larger family (land as inheritance and rest) and *hospitality*, generously extending the produce of the land to others (even strangers) in time of need.⁷ **Life-land-hospitality** serves as one central framework for Old Testament ethics. Cain violates this paradigm by killing his brother. Later figures like Abraham, Joseph, Ruth and Boaz, and David illustrate this paradigm in other ways.

This is not the only ethical paradigm in the Old Testament. We recognize it as central because the language of family becomes the grammar of the people of God even in the New Testament. Also, it is central because the other ethical paradigms depend upon it.

We will encounter several other exemplars of ethical paradigms in the figure of the royal ruler (the king whose central role is to ensure **justice**), the sage (who acquires and dispenses **wisdom**), the priest (whose role is to foster, transmit and protect **holiness**) and the prophet (who *declares the word of the Lord*, insisting on justice, holiness and wisdom among God's people). We will encounter models from each of these arenas of Israel's life as we work through the various units of this course. Each will provide a distinct window onto the values and ethical challenges portrayed in Scripture.

Summary

We have rushed through much of Scripture, counting on you having some background and knowledge and being able to fill in the details we have neglected. The Bible makes it clear that we were created originally to be imagers of God in love, mercy, justice, compassion, kindness, long-suffering and wisdom—the entire range of moral qualities that make up the character of God. However, disobedience has led to a world of suffering and trouble, a world of idolatry and injustice. We do not love God and our neighbor properly.

God has given us ethical guidance in the stories and words of the Bible. There we find the definitive revelation of what God wants from human life. We have the ideal portrayed in creation and foreshadowed in the future coming Kingdom of God. We discover that grace is the foundation of what God does, including how God reshapes us ethically—first the promise (and faith) and then law (and obedience). The writings of the Old Testament give us a window onto the hearts of God's faithful and obedient people. The prophets give us a great revelation of God's response to the people when they turn away into idolatry and injustice. The Gospels display the fullness of salvation in Jesus Christ, the only One who lived a perfect, sinless life. Acts and the Epistles show us the implications of Jesus as Lord for all of

⁶ Chris J. H. Wright, *An Eye for an Eye: The Place of Old Testament Ethics Today* (InterVarsity Press, 1983). Cf. Waldemar Janzen, *Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach* (Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994).

⁷ Janzen, op. cit., pp.26-55; Cf. Wright, pp.19-65.

life. We find in Scripture the framework for a Christian worldview, relevant to all our cultural worldviews and sufficient to equip us to lead productive, faithful lives in all our different contexts.

Unit 3 Final Assignment

Final Assignment

1. Write on one to two pages your understanding of how a Christian worldview shapes your ideas about ethical living and leading.
2. On another one to two pages write about the aspects of your life and work that you see as special challenges to your desire to live and lead others ethically. How do you hope to meet these challenges?
3. Please confirm that you have discussed the results of your interactive work in Unit 3 (“Think About It” boxes) with a group of two other people. (See “Note on Process” on page v in the “Expectations for the Course” section of Introduction to the Course.)
4. Have you read Stott, pp. 49-70? What do you think about Stott’s notion of “a Christian worldview”? Do you think his “fourfold framework” is a good starting point? Why?

When your work is complete (three to five pages total), send a copy to your facilitator via email as an attachment. Please send it by the date indicated in the Module Calendar.

Appendix A: Paul’s “Vice lists”

Romans 1:18-32	Colossians 3:5-9	Galatians 5:19-21	Ephesians 4:25-5:14
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ungodliness • wickedness • futile in thinking • senseless minds • fools • (idolatry) • lusts of their hearts • impurity • degrading their bodies • exchange truth for lie • worship creature • degrading passions • unnatural intercourse • shameless acts • debased mind • things that should not be done • evil • covetousness • malice • envy • murder • strife • deceit • craftiness • gossips • slanderers • God-haters • insolent • haughty • boastful • ruthless • practice things worthy of death • applaud those who do them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • whatever is earthly • fornication • impurity • passion • evil desire • greed (idolatry) • anger • wrath • malice • slander • abusive language • lies • the old self with its practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • works of the flesh • fornication • impurity • licentiousness • idolatry • sorcery • enmities • strife • jealousy • anger • quarrels • dissensions • factions • envy • drunkenness • carousing • things like these 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • falsehood • anger • making room for the devil • stealing • evil talk • bitterness • wrath • anger • wrangling • slander • malice • fornication • impurity of any kind • greed • obscene, silly, vulgar talk • the greedy (idolater) • unfruitful works of darkness • shameful things done in secret • foolish debauchery (drunkenness)

<p>I Timothy 1:6-10</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • meaningless talk • lawless • disobedient • godless • sinful • unholy • profane • father/mother killers • murderers • fornicators • sodomites (pederasty) • slave traders • liars • perjurers • whatever is contrary to sound doctrine 	<p>II Timothy 3:2-9</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lovers of themselves • lovers of money • boasters • arrogant • abusive • disobedient to parents • ungrateful • unholy • inhuman • implacable • slanderers • profligates • brutes • haters of good • treacherous • reckless • swollen with conceit • lovers of pleasure (rather than God) • outward forms of godliness (deny power) • swayed by all kinds of desires • never arriving at truth • corrupt mind • counterfeit faith • oppose the truth • folly 	<p>Titus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • debauchery (1:6) (3:3) • envy • rebellious • despicable • arrogant (1:7) • hating one another • quick-tempered (3:9) • stupid controversies, addicted to wine • genealogies, violent dissensions • greedy for gain, quarrels about the law • rebellious people (1:10) • unprofitable and worthless idle talkers (controversies) • deceivers (3:11) • perverted teaching for sordid gain (1:11) • sinful liars (1:12) • vicious brutes • lazy gluttons • corrupt (1:15) • unbelieving • denying God by actions (1:16) • detestable, disobedient • unfit for any good work • slanderers (2:3) • slaves to drink • talking back (2:9) • pilfering (2:10) • impiety (2:12) • worldly passions, all iniquity (2:14) • speaking evil (of others) (3:2) • quarreling • foolish (3:3) • disobedient • led astray • slaves to various passions/pleasures • malice
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Ethics for Living and Leading

Unit 4

How Do We Make Sense of What to Do in Real Life?



Development Associates International

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Unit 4 – How Do We Make Sense of What to Do in Real Life? (The role of discernment and practical wisdom)

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Learning Outcomes:

At the end of this unit you will be able to:

- State the relationship between the general and specific guidance God gives us in navigating life;
- Outline the meaning of discernment;
- Indicate the meaning and place of the “conscience” in ethical living;
- Answer seven key questions about decisions or actions you are thinking of taking in a situation.

Steps to Complete Unit 4

Read and Respond

Readings are included at the end of most units. These texts provide biblical and cultural framework for an adequate understanding of Christian ethics. Please reflect and respond as indicated in assignments found within the texts.

Supplementary text: John R. W. Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, 4th Edition (Zondervan 2006). 269-321 Celebrating Ethnic Diversity; Simplicity, Gen. & Contentment

Lecture Notes & Workbook

Overview

Of one thing we can be sure—as long as we live we will be confronted with new challenges. Technology, globalization, massive migrations of peoples, global warming and increased surveillance—we will confront these sorts of situations and choices and many more. Many will be novel, requiring that we think carefully and faithfully. We will need to be ready not only to draw deeply on the wisdom and guidance of the past but also to create new rules and guidelines for the new things that come our way (Matthew 13:52). With good foundations in the ethical instruction of the Bible, we have the capability to continue to grow ethically. Of course we need to draw on the wide ethical resources of the whole Bible and not limit ourselves to the most popular or important parts of Scripture that give us direct ethical guidance. We need those “lesser” parts—the narrative stories, the wisdom of proverbs, the rebuke of the prophets, and the ideals of Creation—and more. All of the various parts contribute to our ethical fitness.

In our modern world with areas such as same-sex sexuality, we find ourselves at new frontiers in genetics, brain differences, twin studies and claims about the biological roots of human sexual identity. The science of homosexuality impacts the way we discuss sexuality. It is not a matter of science versus religion, as some would construe this matter. It is a matter of understanding more deeply how things are constructed and work in a fallen world. In addition, it is a matter of finding clarity on the teachings of Scripture about sexuality in general and same-sex sexuality in particular. (See Appendix A of Unit 7 for an outline summary of the debate regarding Scripture and this ethical issue.)

This is also true in the abortion debate. Scripture does not tell us precisely, scientifically or definitively when human life begins. Much of the intractability of the debate between the pro-choice and the pro-life partisans depends on differences in definitions. It is less a debate about which values or principles to follow than one over the definition of when human life begins. One side defines life as developing within the gestation period; the other marks the beginning of life when the sperm fertilizes the ovum (and some when the egg is implanted in the womb). Science has enabled us to peer into this process and follow this biological continuum from beginning to end. However, it does not provide clear markers for ethical guidance. All Christians want to treasure human life from when it fully begins to when it fully ends. But what are the boundary markers? How do we think and act faithfully so all humans have good beginnings and good endings—and good “in-betweens”?

We have spent time learning to understand the source of a Christian worldview. Our clear answer is the Bible, with its principles, rules and examples that give us the ethical guidelines and values that express the will of God. Also basic to good conduct is an understanding of what is at stake in given situations. Ethical maturity involves the capacity to size up a situation and the people engaged and figure out what is going on—what values are in play? What moral boundaries are at risk of being crossed? What temptations or dilemmas are present and make choices about conduct difficult for the agents involved? What might be lost if people choose unethically instead of what is right? How do we determine that *this* rule or *this* model from Scripture applies to me, here and now, in this situation?

As we will discover as we move forward, the problem with principles, rules or commandments is that they have to be applied to given situations. It is not always clear how to live them out faithfully. Rules and principles are rather general, universal and abstract, but the situation I face is unique, specific and concrete. I know I must do the loving thing or tell the truth, but I often do not know the loving thing to do for this person with this personality and problem. I think I know the truth, but how do I speak it in love to *this* person? Sometimes I am not sure some people have the right to know the truth I know. Sometimes silence is better than speech. How do the general principles I seek to follow allow my actions to be appropriate and life-giving for this unique situation and the people involved?

In some ways, reading a situation is like reading a text. You have to know the “language” of the situation (what are the social definitions of the interactions) and its “grammar” (the way things are structured). In reading a book you need to know its genre. Is it fiction? Or is it a novel, non-fiction, a science text or a fairy story? You consider how it is put together, looking at its table of contents and major segments. You also want to know the chief characters in the story.

In like manner, to discern what is at stake in a situation, you need to know how the chief actors define the situation and who those key actors are. What are they trying to accomplish? By what rules are they playing “the game”? What is your role and standing in that situation? What can you hope to accomplish, realistically speaking? Are there prior rules or principles that, when applied carefully, can illuminate the situation and give us definitive guidance? Or, are there novel elements in the situations such that we need new wisdom, the writing of new guidelines to enable us to do the loving and just things in addressing this situation?

Biotechnology and the increasing ability of medicine and genetics to control and reshape our physical environment raise new issues that cry out for new thinking. The same is true for military and information technology. Suddenly we are confronted with an array of new capabilities and situations with enormous possibilities that Christian ethics has not faced in the past.

While we may not be faced personally with the question of deploying and implementing nuclear weapons, our government leaders may be. How do we counsel them in the face of the consequences of the types of warfare we can now wage? What about the new use of “drones” where air strikes are made with decisions from thousands of miles away on the basis of ambiguous information and the risk of innocents being killed? Or the use of millions of land mines, leaving civilians maimed and killed for years after hostilities cease?

Is there one right thing to do?

Even more vivid for most of us than questions of war, abortion or homosexuality are the more mundane questions of our lives. Shall I marry? Whom shall I marry? Shall we have another child? What vocation or job should I prepare to undertake for my life’s work? Shall I enroll in some educational program? At which institution? What should I do about the invitation to become Sunday school teacher for the high school students? What should we do about renting or buying a place to live? Do we need better furniture? Out of all my siblings, whose responsibility is it to help care for our sick mother? How and when should I tell my spouse that I was unfaithful? What should I do when I see coworkers skimming money from the projects we are managing? What do I do about my strong attraction to a person to whom I’m not married?

The Christian tradition gives us two important counsels about our lives. On one side, it reminds us that the God we know and love is personally engaged with us. Even the details of our lives are known and cared about by God. God has a will for our lives, and we need to discover it and follow it in all things big and little. On the other side, we are reminded that God gives us freedom and the tools of reason and conscience to make our own decisions. St. Augustine highlights this when he famously said, “Love God and do what you will.”¹ Augustine was reminding us that if our loves are well-ordered, we will “naturally” do what God wills for life without having to be told the right thing to do each time.

These two counsels can seem to pull in different directions. Are we to wait until we have a “burning bush” encounter or some vision that tells us “Go in this direction and do that?” Or, are we to put our trust in God and forge ahead with our best wisdom and reasons without a specific word from God?

There seems to be an obvious truth in both. Maybe we need not emphasize one at the expense of the other. Maybe the importance of each depends upon the issue that faces us. In any case, there is no formula that will work in all cases for all people. We walk by faith, not by formulas. Nevertheless, as leaders we need to have some guidelines, even if not formulas.

How do we make sense of what to do in real life?

Before you continue this unit, read the article at the end of this module—Peter Kreeft: “Does God have one right choice for me in each decision I make?” It will provide a framework for some of the things you will deal with as you think about finding the guidance and making the decision you need under ambiguous, complex and even difficult circumstances.

Think About It

Answer Box # 1

What is your reaction to Pete Kreeft’s article on guidance? Do you think he is basically right? Is it a well-balanced and wise account of how guidance takes place? Or, do you think he has really missed the point of how we need to seek out and discern the will of God? Why?

Can we agree on something? Much of what you do in your life is *not* a matter of right or wrong. Most of life’s decisions are “neutral” and do not reach the level of morality at all. It is right if you choose to do them and right if you choose not to do them. Whether to wear the blue jeans or the black ones, whether to drive the van or ride the bike to work, invest in stocks or put the money in savings—these are “no-lose” situations in the ethical or moral sense.²

¹ “Dilige et quod vis fac” in Epist. Joann. Tractatus, vii, 8.

² For more on this see Lewis B. Smedes, *Choices: Making Right Decisions in a Complex World* (Harper & Row: 1986).

Of course, they might be wrong in a variety of other ways. We might be overly worried about how we look in jeans or what people will think if we use petrol instead of saving it by riding the bike. We may care more than we should about what other people think. We may even lose sleep or money and may even look bad because of the choice we have made. We may be dumb or embarrassed, but we are not guilty.

A morally positive thing can become morally negative if we do it in a way that hurts someone else. The *how*, *when*, *where* and *why* can make a moral difference in what we do. The rule covering a lot of things is simply to act responsibly. Drive responsibly. Dress responsibly. Use money responsibly. This is the general rule for much of life—live responsibly.

There are many things that are called *adiaphora*. This is a Greek word that means “not at the heart of the matter.” It is a way of saying some things are not matters of morality. We are free to go left, right or even stand still on them. They are matters of personal taste, cultural preference and social convention. They are part of the things that fill up life and bring us joy and comfort. In them we need to be responsible. But the decisions to play classical music, reggae, jazz or pop can all be good decisions.

To act responsibly means that we take initiative. We make things happen. We exercise our choice. We see ourselves as free to choose. We don’t have to do this or that. However, having chosen to do this rather than that, we know things happen because we initiated them. We are responsible for them.

To act responsibly means that we are responding genuinely to our situation. When we walk (or drive) into a situation, there are other people already there, giving signals. As responsible agents, we come into every situation knowing we are being asked the following question: What will you do about the situation? Just as we know the people who are there are also implicitly asking, “What are you going to do about me?”

We act responsibly when we are sensitive to our situation and answer, by our conduct and choices, those implicit questions. We seek to read the situation and understand what is going on and then respond, not simply react or “go with the flow.”

We act responsibly when we are willing to explain our actions and choices. This is a part of integrity—forthrightness. We don’t say “the devil made me do it” or “I was just in a bad mood.” We don’t excuse our words, actions or choices. If we have been responsible then we are able to say why we chose to do this rather than that. We explain our choice of words and actions, even while knowing that someone else may act perfectly responsibly by doing something different. We can show why what we chose to do or say was appropriate and fitting in the setting—for us. We don’t need to argue that it was the only right thing to do because it is likely not the only right thing.

So in answering the question “Is there one right thing to do?” we have to be sure we are asking about things that are right or wrong. This is one question that makes Kreeft’s article more helpful. We are not meant to go around always looking over our shoulder or being anxious that we might have just done the “wrong” thing. Life is not meant to be an obsessive-compulsive marathon of worry. Much of what we do involves matters of *adiaphora*. There are loads of things that are morally neutral, but this is not all that needs to be said. We do have things that are central to morality. We need to look at some of them.

A. Integrity

We all admire people whose lives demonstrate an ethical and moral wholeness. We are awash in “unintegrity”—actions that lack moral or ethical soundness. Often people would rather win at any cost than lose well in things such as examinations, business dealings and athletic contests. So, they “play dirty,” using what they would publicly acknowledge as unfair and underhanded. They want to win so much that they will use any means to ensure that they come out on top. The cost to their own conscience or to other people’s lives and reputations is simply not a concern for them.

This is not a real option for one who is a genuine Christ-follower. We seek to live an integral life, a life that is knit together in complete harmony fostered by the character of God. Integrity is not so much single-mindedness or complete consistency with some principle as it is a wholeness and maturity of life. Integrity refers to a person who is not inwardly divided. A life of integrity means a life marked by a wholeness of response to God, a well-lived life that displays righteousness on the inside and outside, in public as well as in private. It is a life of uprightness, honesty and sincerity.

One of the key elements of integrity goes beyond what many see as integrity: the steadiness that enables one to live consistently with ethical values even when it is personally costly. Discernment is equally important. It is the insight into which values or standards are good and applicable. We would hardly call the person who viewed another ethnic group as no more than cockroaches that needed to be exterminated and who acted consistently on that value a person of integrity. Being true to oneself or living consistently with one’s espoused values and standards is not enough. The values need to be the right values, and they need to be the right values for *this* situation or occasion.

Discernment is the ability to see the right things to do in a situation. A person of integrity is a person who acts in a principled manner. The principles aid discernment, but a person with the wrong principles who consistently acts in line with them is not a person of integrity (or else we would call Hitler

an exemplar of integrity). Integrity entails moral reflection. Before acting, the person of integrity reflects on the situation and discerns what principles and values are appropriate to guide decisions and actions.

Now we ask, what is discernment and why is it so difficult for so many?

B. Discernment

The apostle Paul provides us with counsel on this:

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:2)

Paul speaks of the process in which we have been engaged this whole course (and other courses in this program)—*the renewal of our mind*. With the capability of seeing things in a different light and thinking about our situations with a different pattern, we are able to discern (“test and approve”) God’s will. Knowing the right thing to do is not automatic. It involves a process of putting a pattern of action to the test and thus approving it as good, pleasing and perfect within the will of God. The indication of authentic transformation by the renewing of the mind is an ethical consciousness and conduct. Those transformed over time grow to have the ability to form and carry out a Christian ethical judgment in every situation. The will of God is marked by three characteristics.

1. It is Good

The adjectives used by Paul in Romans 12 are significant. “Good” refers to what spiritually mature and wise people would see as beneficial for human life and fostering the central elements that constitute an ideal life. It is actually good for people, even when it may not appear to be to all involved. It brings the Creator’s gifts built into humans into greater use and higher development. What is bad for Creation and life is not part of the will of God. God’s will always aims at what is good.

Part of discernment is *seeing the good that needs to be done or created in given situations*. When God finished each day of Creation God looked upon it and said, “It is good.” Part of knowing the will of God is seeing what is good for these people, this person and this situation. If this sounds like a consequentialist ethical point, it is, though perhaps not always in the same sense consequentialists mean. The good here is defined by the ideals and dynamics of the Kingdom of God, not the notions of the ideal or good according to the dynamics of our current age. Consequentialists often appeal to pleasure as the highest good, even when they talk not about the lowest pleasures (hedonism) but about the highest pleasures.

2. It is Pleasing

“Pleasing” refers to something that we can affirm unconditionally at the end of the day and even at the end of our lifetime. It is not likely that Paul meant “pleasing to God” since God’s own will is obviously pleasing to God. Earlier, Paul discusses the offering of our bodies as a living sacrifice that is “pleasing to God.” (Romans 12:1) However, Romans 12:2 is not about what is pleasing to God.

Is it also not about finding that our embodiment of the will of God pleases other people. People are often pleased when something fits plans for their life and their own gratification and upset when they don’t get what they want. Paul does not seem to be encouraging this attitude. More likely, Paul sees the will of God as something that a person will look back on without regrets. What one hoped might happen in a situation (viewed from a renewed mind perspective) has happened because one has carried out the will of God. One is pleased that God’s will has triumphed and been manifest in the situation. In the end, one has found doing the will of God a pleasing thing. God’s will is not something that requires the gritting of one’s teeth to do, however unpleasant it might be. It turns out that God’s will will be something that is pleasing to us when our desires and decisions are aligned with God.

Part of discernment grows out of a mature and strong conscience. It is something to which our inner moral consciousness and the witness of the Spirit whisper an affirmation. It is that deep, inner conviction that we have done God’s will, and there is nothing better than knowing this. Having done God’s will is not only satisfactory (because it is good) but also satisfying (because it nurtures an inner joy and integrity). It is the sense to which Jesus points when he told his disciples, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work.” (John 4:34)

Discernment means finding something(s) to do in a given situation that not only produces good for others but also something that strengthens our own integrity and inner sense of joy.

3. It is Perfect

“Perfect” carries with it the idea of something that has reached its full development, its destiny. It is something that is complete. There is a satisfying wholeness about God’s desires for human conduct and life. If we embody that will, it brings with it all that fulfills human life and fosters the abundant life God designed humans to experience.

Ethical Foundations: Unit 4 - How Do We Make Sense of What to Do in Real Life?

To be sure, we know, given our fallible and fallen condition, nothing we do is perfect. The Preacher reminds us of our difference from God when he says, “I know that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it.” (Ecclesiastes 3:14). There are always things that could have been added to (our sins of omission) and taken from our actions (our sins of commission). What we do is not perfect and does not endure forever. What endures is God’s perfect will. Our understanding and execution of it is less than perfect. *Discernment is rooted in seeing what is ideal, identifying the perfect will of God and moving in that direction.*

Often we know that what we are able to accomplish in complex and difficult circumstances is less than ideal. However, we also know that making progress in the direction of the ideal is often the best we can do. God looks for progress, growth in the direction we know corresponds to God’s perfect will for Creation and human life.

To discern is to perceive something that is present but often hidden or concealed. It is to see through and into the various forces, factors and relationships involved in a given situation of a specific organization or social structure. It is to perceive what is at stake. It gives us the clues as to the right thing to do. It is insight into what is going on around us and in us.

We often long for a sign, for some dramatic, visible or audible event that tells us just what we are to do. We plead with God saying, “Send me a sign! A lightning bolt, a message in a bottle, a whisper, something.” However, it seldom comes.

The reality is that nothing can guarantee the ways of the Spirit in our lives. We already know from Paul’s words that we need to resist the pressures of our world as it seeks to get us to conform to ways of thinking and valuing that are contrary to Kingdom ways. We know that we need to be actively renewing our minds by deepening our knowledge of Scripture and by practicing those disciplines that reshape our outlook on life. These two things need to be happening in our lives.

Beyond resisting the pressures of our world and actively renewing our minds there is also discernment—testing and approving. This happens not simply by the rational process of thinking through alternatives (such as the RESOLVEDD method later). It is also a matter of venturing out, making the decision that seems best to us and putting it into action. It is like testing a new vehicle. We drive it out onto the roads and paths, the potholes and difficult inclines that we must traverse in our work. The test drive tells us whether the vehicle has the qualities necessary to carry us to and from our destinations.

In putting a solution into action, we learn from the results and the ensuing responses whether we have discovered the right thing to do. Sometimes we suffer because what we thought was “good, pleasing and perfect” turns out to be “bad, offensive and flawed.” We have tested it in action, and it has caused a lot of difficulty and trouble we had not anticipated.

Of course, alternatively, we may discover that it is good, pleasing and perfect. We might look at what seemed an impossible situation. We take action and see that we enacted an answer to the situation that fostered Kingdom values and modeled conduct that imaged Christ. We might be pleased that what we feared did not happen. Instead, that for which we had hoped came to pass in ways we had not even imagined.

This test drive we take is not a lonely drive into the uncharted future. We bring with us mentors, wiser and more experienced guides who can coach us because they have been on this same path before. They can give us their best advice and help us navigate around the potholes and difficult mud holes that might stop us in our tracks. Part of discernment is listening carefully and appreciatively (and critically) to the experience of other leaders. Some see much more clearly than we do. Some have been successful at defusing very volatile and challenging situations. Some have learned how to finesse delicate and dangerous relationships. Discernment listens and learns.

Think About It

Answer Box # 2

When you think on your own experience, would you say it is difficult to discern “the good, pleasing and perfect will of God”? Can you think of decisions and situations you currently face to which you would say, “I don’t know what to do. This is difficult and confusing”? What are they? What might you do to discern the good and right thing to do?

C. Conscience

Some approaches to ethics emphasize the “conscience,” that inner faculty that recognizes right and wrong, that causes us to feel guilt or remorse when we violate standards of right or that allows us to feel positive and affirmed when we do what is right. It is an inner critical consciousness that is rooted in a moral sensibility about motives and conduct. It is the internal court that makes judgments about our conduct in terms of norms or standards of behavior. It is this faculty of the human self that is deeply involved as we test and approve things as good, pleasing and perfect. It is one way we name the human capacity to discern right and wrong.

A guilty conscience is an inner indictment and warning that some important boundary has been crossed that threatens the integrity of the guilty party. A sound conscience is one that works properly, recognizing what conduct is unethical or immoral and generating bad feelings inside of us of remorse, shame or guilt when we have engaged those attitudes or actions. If it is a sound conscience, it will also fill us with feelings of affirmation when we have done what is right, regardless of what others may think or what it might have cost us to do it. It gives us that feeling of being pleased which comes with doing the will of God.

Some see the conscience as an inner faculty that God places in all human beings. In other words, we are in some sense born with the capacity or the actual ability to know the universal moral laws that govern human conduct. As we grow up, the conscience unfolds and becomes a witness within to right and wrong. This seems to be Paul’s viewpoint in Romans 2:14-16—the law of God is “written” on the hearts of those who do not have the law of God found written in Scripture. Their consciences bear witness to that inner knowledge.

Even if God created us with this capacity, we cannot say that the conscience is the voice of God within human consciousness. As Paul depicts the conscience, it is a part of our inner self that acts somewhat independently of our desires, subjective wishes and personal world. It is more an evaluative voice than a directive or normative voice. When it is sound and pure, it is an inner critical voice that affirms or condemns our attitudes, actions and relationships. However, it can be hardened and perverted so that it approves the wrong and rejects the right.

For some, this inner light is sufficient and well-informed. “Follow your conscience. Do what your best inner self tells you is right.” For others, the conscience is a sort of neutral court, and its validity and integrity depends upon it being informed with the proper standards and moral norms. In other words, it does not come with those standards given innately but must be trained to see clearly the right and the wrong. This latter position is closer to the view of the Bible. To be sure, there is enough knowledge of right and wrong among humans in general that all are guilty of violating what they know and believe to be right and good. However, the conscience needs to be trained in the truth of things.

Paul speaks of the “strong” and the “weak” (1 Corinthians 8, 10; cf. Romans 14) among Christians. The strong have consciences grounded in the truth. In matters that involve scruples (eating certain foods, observing certain days or rituals) they are able to participate without harming their conscience. The weak are not yet well-formed or informed properly, and, therefore, they cannot act with full Christian freedom in those same areas. When they do, they have uneasy consciences and can harm their consciences and spiritual life. The conscience must be well-informed for it to perform properly. The conscience must have the truth about things and the standards of right or it can mislead. Nevertheless, Paul insists that each Christian must be convinced in his or her mind and not violate the conscience, even when it is a “weak” one. Nor should the “strong” (who are correct in these matters because they have learned the truth) use their authentic freedom in these matters to draw the “weak” into conduct that will violate their conscience.

The notion that people have a conscience is widely shared. Christians are not the only ones who speak of this inner capacity. However, we also need to say that as an explicit category, the conscience is not a universal notion. It is not mentioned in the Old Testament.³ It is a New Testament term that was widely shared with the Greco-Roman world. This does not mean some cultures are populated by people without consciences. It simply means the way this inner “voice” is understood takes on a different vocabulary and terminology in different cultures. All cultures recognize right and wrong. The vast majority of humans acquire an inner sense of that right and wrong as they grow up. To say that conscience is not a universal quality of humans because not all cultures have a word recognizing it is like saying malaria did not happen in the Roman world because they had no word for it. Conscience is a part of us all, but it is recognized in different ways.

One indication that this is a widely shared notion can be found in United Nations documents. The UN recognizes “conscience” as an important feature of human rights and life. Consider the following elements from United Nations documents:

³ To be sure, some translations use the term “conscience” (as in Genesis 20:5-6 in the NIV, TNIV). The phrase is “in the integrity of my heart.” The NIV takes this phrase to be what we mean by “conscience.” There is no Hebrew word for “conscience.” Nor is it clear that the Hebrew phrase is best translated in this manner.

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All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

—United Nations, Universal Declaration on Human Rights Article 1.⁴

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

—United Nations, Universal Declaration on Human Rights Article 18.⁵

Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.

—United Nations, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights Article 18.⁶

These statements provide ideals that are important values for peoples and nations to embody. We all know nations fall short of actually and successfully embodying this freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Nevertheless, it is a sign that, across cultures and national boundaries, conscience is recognized as an important human capability that, when diminished or denied, leads life towards destruction.

Perhaps we can summarize in this way. Conscience acts properly when a person has proper knowledge of moral norms and the situation, sufficient freedom to choose a course of action and the emotional stability and strength to carry out the decision or action. The conscience is not a sufficient guide to action without those three conditions.

Think About It

Answer Box # 3

Can you recount a time when you felt terribly guilty about something you did? What was it? Do you think the guilt you felt was appropriate to the seriousness of the behavior that elicited that feeling? Why?

D. Prudence

You can't do the good unless you know the good. The conscience, by itself, is not sufficient, as we have noted. It is a sign, an alarm that things might not be well. However, by itself, the conscience needs to be properly educated. We can have a strong conviction that is rooted in our conscience, and yet the conviction that informs the conscience may be wrong. We feel guilty about something that we should not feel guilty about because it is not a genuine violation of an authentic moral standard. Or alternatively, we may engage in really bad behavior and have no sense of compunction or guilt about it. We may have not learned that such behavior or attitudes are ethically reprehensible. Our inner response toward such conduct is flawed and damaged.

We may have a misguided conscience because of our childhood experiences and modeling. We may have fallen in with a group whose practice violated our conscience. We went along to get along. Over time our conscience was "hardened" so what used to bother us no longer does. Or, we simply may not yet be well-formed. We may not have taken the time to become clear on what standards and values are applicable to guide our behavior in given arenas of life. We may lack the knowledge essential to a well-functioning conscience.

⁴ <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ <http://www.hrweb.org/legal/cpr.html>, Accessed December 17, 2010.

However, even with a conscience that is well-formed and well-informed, there is still more involved in making good moral decisions and acting ethically. Classically the Christian tradition pointed to the virtue of prudence.⁷ This simply means practical wisdom. Prudence is the ability to judge between what is a good as opposed to a bad action with regard to particular people in a given situation, time and place. This practical wisdom is thought to be a pivotal quality of the ethical or moral life because it regulates all the other virtues.

Prudence distinguishes, in given situations, when an act is courageous as opposed to reckless or cowardly. It is the insight or knowledge that sees into a situation with its constellation of people and forces and determines the right course of action. It does not act itself. It is the knowledge or insight on the basis of which a decision and action can be taken. It is prudence that enables people to choose the right means to achieve the right ends. Prudence is the well-developed capability to make right decisions that correspond to reality.

It is a habit of deliberation in which a person is reflective, taking an appropriate amount of time to think through a situation and come to a clear and effective decision. The prudent person is realistic without being too pessimistic or overly optimistic in assessing the situation and the possibilities for achieving a given end. It is a form of “right knowing,” not right acting.

Another way to approach prudence is to remember that our standards of conduct are frequently framed in very general or abstract terms. They must be applied to given situations and people. Rules must have some universality or they are of little use to us. However, their relevance and applicability to a given case is often not obvious or simple. Prudence is needed. Prudence is the habit or practice of making well-formed and correct judgments with regard to practical situations, especially when there are dilemmas involved in them. It is broader than ethics but includes our ethical and moral situations.

We say a person has prudence when he is able to carry out actions in a wise and mature manner that matches the means he chooses to achieve good ends. Prudence is the ability to know when and how to break bad news to people, whom to hire as the right person for the job, what code of conduct will enable an organization’s employees to become more accountable and ethical and whether it is better this time to pass over an offence (in mercy) or insist on the full measure of justice. It is wisdom in practical matters of life.

We see prudence in the military leader who sees how to deploy the troops for a battle or the person who manages her money well and is able to care for her family. We also see prudence in a counselor who is able to give good advice to people who find themselves in difficult circumstances, such as a couple dealing with domestic violence or sexual abuse. For all its difficulties, we see prudence in a nation (such as South Africa) setting up a “Truth and Reconciliation Commission”⁸ to handle issues of restorative justice coming out of a terrible era of violence and oppression. We see prudence when a teenager is at a party where alcohol is freely flowing. When she doesn’t drink because she will be driving people home, we see prudence in action.

One necessary note: craftiness, deceit or simple cleverness is not prudence. Prudence serves good ends, not evil ones. The cleverness of a financial wizard in putting together complex financial instruments in order to dramatically increase the bottom line of a company is not prudence. The use of “off-book” arrangements that helped enable the giant company Enron to appear to be streaking ahead in profits and growth is not prudence. We may say of an extremely clever criminal that he is very smart but not that he is prudent. We all know people who are very successful in getting to the goals and ends they set for themselves but do it by cutting corners and stepping on people around them. They are clever but not prudent.

Having said all this, our primary interest is not the general range of things prudence is able to accomplish but how it helps in ethics. What are the enemies of prudence? What things must not be confused with it? What sorts of behavior are evidence of a lack of prudence? In general we can talk about an “excessive” or a “deficient” prudence, too much or too little of this capability.

1. Too much “prudence”: Indecisiveness

Of course, in speaking this way we are really saying there are some things that look like prudence but are really something else. An “excess” of prudence is manifested in timidity, over-cautiousness or lack of courage. Some people say they are prudent in a situation when they are simply being passive, not deciding or acting because they lack courage or are overly cautious.

We might think of the story of the Good Samaritan as a possible case of “too much prudence.” The priest and the Levite may have passed on the other side, muttering, “The prudent thing to do is not to get involved. After all, the man may be dead and touching him would render me unclean. Or, maybe it is a trap. I go over there, and the thieves will spring into action, beat me and steal my pocket money as well.

⁷ Prudence comes from the Latin *prudencia* (foresight, sagacity), a contraction of *providencia* (foresight). It is what is expressed when one shows sound judgment in practical affairs. It is seeing into a situation and into the future in such a way that one makes wise decisions and takes good action.

⁸ <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/report/index.htm>

No, the best thing to do is to hurry on by.” They may have been overly cautious or lacked the courage to get involved.

We see timidity in organizations that are facing significant environmental changes but seem paralyzed. Rather than rethink their strategies and take action to meet the changing world, they simply repeat the same mistakes and plans again and again. The airline industry seems a case in point. They continue to follow the same lines of action and services, while losing billions year after year. There is a saying that encapsulates this phenomenon. “It is easy to become a millionaire. Start out a billionaire and buy an airline company.” Why do they seem incapable of fundamental change?

The same may be said of universities in a new age of the internet. As a consequence of indecisiveness, many remain solidly wedded to the traditional residential campus and calendar. The new for-profit universities and web-based programs continue to outpace and outperform traditional deliveries of education. University professors are notoriously resistant to change. They always want to study the options endlessly before making a decision. It is the paralysis of analysis. There is more than a hint of over-cautiousness.

It is not difficult to point to churches and denominations as well. They too have been slow to change their “wineskins,” those parts that are not “at the heart” of the matter of being the community of the King.⁹ Wars over worship and music styles, splits over spiritual practices, battles over baptism modes, clashes over cultural adaptations—the church seems self-absorbed and timid in the face of the gigantic human needs that surround it. Often it has seemed preoccupied with small matters of church life and incapable or unwilling to tackle the difficult and complex issues of life that surround it. It seems overcautious.

2. Too little “prudence”: Impulsiveness

The opposite of too much prudence can be true as well. Here we meet recklessness or precipitousness, thoughtless negligence or inconsideration. In this case people have not taken the necessary time to reflect on and listen to the situation. They blunder ahead in the zeal to “fix” the situation. They are reckless. They are impulsive. They make rash judgments.

Why is this? For some it is a lack of openness to the situation in which they find themselves. They do not genuinely “listen” to the question of the situation, “What are you going to do about me?” Perhaps they think they already have the answer without really listening carefully to the specific question that needs to be answered in that situation. Perhaps they are simply stressed and in a hurry to get beyond this particular issue and problem.

For some it is a matter of lack of understanding or knowledge. They don’t really know the way things work in this sort of situation. So they make “dumb” decisions. They assume if their intentions are good, they don’t need to spend the time to figure out what is going on. They do not expend energy thinking about likely consequences of this or that line of action, and they blunder ahead.

For some it is a matter of projecting a self that needs to appear “in control” and fully competent. They do not want to say, “I really don’t know a good answer to that, but I will take the time to find one.” They do not want to do things that, in their eyes, show weakness or indecision. In their view, no time is better than now, and no decision is better than the immediate one.

For some, the problem is simply inexperience combined with high emotions. Young people (and the immature) are still on a quest to grow into mature responses. High passions of anger can lead to unfortunate venting of feelings that make a situation worse. Sexual desires can lead young people into giving up their virginity before marriage. The loyalty of friendship can lead to covering up the alcoholism of another, thus enabling it.

Having said all of this, we need to balance these statements with this comment. We learn to make good decisions by making bad ones. Prudence is not learned from books but from experience. We do make mistakes. However, if we learn from them, we can grow into well-formed, prudent people. There will be a lot of trial and error. At the same time, we know we can learn from the examples and mentoring of others who are further along than we are. Some errors are not worth making.

Also, we do not always develop prudence in all affairs of our lives. We may be very wise in handling sensitive situations at work and be an absolute fool in our family life (or vice versa). Think about that great wise man, Solomon. How astonishing is his handling of the case of the two mothers claiming the same baby! (1 Kings 3:16-18) He understood the situation. He understood motherhood and the inner emotions involved. His ploy of cutting the baby in half uncovered the true mother. However, what a fool he was in filling his harem with hundreds of women and in participating with them in their religious practices.

⁹ Howard Synder, *The Problem of Wineskins: Church Structure in a Technological Age* (InterVarsity Press, 1975) raised this very question several decades ago about the imprudent conduct of too many denominations holding onto too many things as essentials of the gospel rather than as the containers of that gospel.

Think About It

Answer Box # 4

How would you rate yourself on prudence? Is this a well-developed habit? Do you see yourself as having a lot of practical wisdom that helps you regularly make good decisions and take good actions? Are you more inclined to indecisiveness or impulsiveness?

To what does this all add up? What do we need to do as we navigate life to live well and joyfully? How can we be practical and wise in our affairs? How can we discern the good, pleasing and perfect will of God in our circumstances? Later on in this unit I want to suggest that we ask ourselves seven questions that can help us discern the answers to these questions, especially when things are very unclear. Some things do not require a lot of time, energy or analysis to reach good decisions, but some do. It is particularly these latter situations about which we are thinking. In addition, in a later unit we will learn a very formal process for examining a situation and finding out, as best we can, the details of the situation and our options for good decisions and actions in the midst of it.

E. Intuition

There is one other topic about which we ought to say a few brief words. Our entire sense of right or wrong does not come from an explicit process of analysis. In fact, some of the best decisions are made on the basis of “instinct” or “intuition.” There is a lot to say here, but most of it has to be reserved for a course on making critical decisions.

What we mean by intuition is the apparent ability to draw knowledge without any clear effort or process of analysis. It is quick and ready insight. It is a gut instinct. It is knowledge that we see but have no clear explanation for why we know it. We get a vision or a feeling about a person or situation. It is a sort of instantaneous prudence. It does not always happen. It is not always correct, but it is a very real part of how people come to decisions about what should be done in a situation.

Some people are more intuitive than others. They simply are better at sensing what is going on than the rest of us. They seem to have an uncanny ability to hear the question that lies at the heart of a situation that faces us and then to see a path through that situation. They get a “hunch” and have the confidence to follow through with that feeling. What do we know about intuition as part of how we come to make sense of what we ought to do?

Studies from healthcare, the military, firefighting and the videogame industry (among others) suggests that intuition is about pattern recognition and pattern matching based on our past experience.¹⁰ Instead of exploring a range of alternatives, intuition leaps to a conclusion on the basis of clues it perceives both consciously and unconsciously. It makes a decision prior to any analysis and data checking by more formal methods.

This is something that is done better by those with a higher level of experience and maturity than novices. These leaders come with a set of stories and schema in their mind from previous experience. They are able to recognize the subtle clues and features in the new situation that are analogous to or different from their earlier experiences. An understanding of the situation is so ingrained that it is virtually tacit knowledge—a sort of nearly unconscious “know how.”

Think of first-time drivers compared to those who have been driving an automobile for many years. The new driver is self-conscious, cautious, uncertain how to steer and afraid of hitting other cars. The experienced driver may be carrying on a conversation and sipping coffee while navigating very crowded and fast-flowing traffic. The experienced driver simply “knows” how to drive without much “thinking” about it anymore. Intuition is like that.

Gary Klein tells this story to illustrate this concept.

I had a conversation with an instructor pilot that really stuck with me,” recalls Klein. “When he first started flying, he was terribly frightened. If he made a mistake, he’d die. He had to follow all of these rules and checklists in order to fly the plane correctly, and it was an extremely nerve-racking time. But at some point in his development, he underwent a profound change. Suddenly, it felt as if he wasn’t flying the plane—it felt as if he was flying. He had internalized all of the procedures for flying until the plane had felt as if it was a part of him. He no longer needed any rules.”¹¹

¹⁰ Gary Klein, *The Sources of Power: How People Make Decisions* (MIT Press, 1999).

¹¹ From Bill Breen, “What’s Your Intuition?” accessed May 7, 2010:

<http://www.fastcompany.com/magazine/38/klein.html>

It was the experience of a fire commander that first allowed Klein to see that many of the decision-making models and recommendations were not how people actually make decisions. This commander claimed many times he had extrasensory perception in knowing what to do. Klein was skeptical, but here is the story the commander told.

He and his crew encounter a fire at the back of a house. The commander leads his hose team into the building. Standing in the living room, they blast water onto the smoke and flames that appear to be consuming the kitchen. But the fire roars back and continues to burn.

The commander is baffled by the fire's persistence. His men douse the fire again, and the flames briefly subside. But then they flare up again with an even greater intensity. The firefighters retreat a few steps to regroup. And then the commander is gripped by an uneasy feeling. His intuition (he calls it a "sixth sense") tells him they should get out of the house. So he orders everyone to leave. Just as the crew reaches the street, the living-room floor caves in. Had they still been inside the house, the men would have plunged into a blazing basement.

Klein realized that the commander gave the order to evacuate because the fire's behavior didn't match his expectations. Much of the fire was burning underneath the living-room floor, so it was unaffected by the firefighters' attack. Also, the rising heat made the room searingly hot—too hot for such a seemingly small fire. Another clue that it was not a run-of-the-mill kitchen blaze: Hot fires are loud, but this one was strangely quiet—because the floor was muffling the roar of the flames that were raging below.

"This incident helped us understand that firefighters make decisions by recognizing when a typical situation is developing," says Klein. "In this case, the events were not typical. The pattern of the fire didn't fit with anything in the commander's experience. That made him uneasy, so he ordered his men out of the building."¹²

The commander did not have extrasensory perception but simply a sharpened sensory perception built on many years of experiences with fires. He detected small details that a novice might not notice (the small but stubborn kitchen fire, the extreme heat, the eerie quiet). All of these were clues that gave him the feeling that something was not right. He just "knew" that they needed to get out of there.

That is the nature of intuition. People have a sort of mental catalog for some situation or experience. Their mind races through these memories almost unconsciously to find a prototypical prior experience that matches or is similar to the one they are experiencing. There is a pattern they recognize, and it tells them, without knowing how, that they need to act in this way or that. When people are asked how they knew how to act, they answer "I just knew."

1. Can intuition be learned?

The answer seems to be a clear yes. Studies with nurses show that senior, expert nurses bring new nurses with them on their rounds. They think out loud, noting subtle clues to the patient's condition, sometimes noting things the medical charts and monitored conditions do not show. The mentoring and modeling of this intuitive process with less experienced nurses is how those new to this medical practice begin to acquire the same way of looking for the small details that might otherwise be missed. Over time they are able to make the same quick, holistic judgments about the situation and the appropriate response.

This same observation holds true for the moral life as well as strategic thinking. Novices and younger leaders often do not yet have the larger experience base to be able to rapidly recognize patterns as well and consistently as the expert. Those who do this well in their area are a real resource. Mentoring is a key to this learning process because most of this is not learned from books but from actual practical experience. If we were to put this into a rule of thumb it might be this: practical wisdom comes from practical experience. Intuition comes from having lots of practical experience and good mentors.

2. Is intuition always right?

Of course not. Intuition is not always right, just like our other carefully thought through decision-making processes are not always right. Intuition is only one method by which decisions are made. Intuitions often need to be checked after the fact. Studies show that good decision makers often have an intuitive sense of the best decision, and only after this sense do they follow through with the analysis and data-collecting to confirm that it is indeed the best. They don't start with a lot of options, compare them to each other and then pick the one that seems best. They don't follow a linear process of

¹² Ibid.

thinking and then deciding, but they do more explicit thinking *after* the intuition. Sometimes the follow-up turns up missed clues and factors. The decision may be aborted for that reason.

Leaders need to combine intuitive judgments with the formal analysis we have been learning. While intuition cannot be replaced with rules and procedures, intuition needs to use analysis to validate (not simply justify) its decisions. Analysis can also help explore intuitive doubts you have as you prepare to make a decision.

3. What are the dangers or weaknesses of intuition?

- Cognitive biases can distort our judgment (such as the well-known preference for paying attention to information that confirms our prior conviction and playing down information that contradicts it).
- In highly complex and ambiguous situations, pattern recognition is very difficult, and we may not make the right match to our past experience or draw the wrong lessons from what we see as analogous situations that really are not.
- Out-dated mental models that no longer match the way the world now works can prevent us from seeing what really is new and different (change has overcome our past experience with novel conditions and realities).
- Well-established rules of thumb that no longer apply are short-cuts and taken-for-granted ways that are often embedded in our intuition and can mislead us.
- Applying intuition to a new arena outside our experience area can create a mismatch that doesn't work.
- It is very hard to communicate our intuitive judgments and choices to others so as to persuade them to commit to the choice we have made.

Think About It

Answer Box # 5

Can you think of a decision you made using intuition? How did it turn out? Is there anything you wished you had done differently? Describe it.

F. Questions for Discernment¹³

The following summary questions might help you test the judgments you are making as you seek to make sense of what to do in real life. You will not always have to ask all these questions, but they will serve you well as you grow and mature in the moral life. With experience and good mentoring, you will find that your intuition will leap quickly over this formal process of asking these. However, you can always come back to these questions to discover how well your intuition worked.

1. Have I taken time to listen sensitively and look carefully in my situation?

If I am discerning, I will be able to sort the important things from the peripheral matters. I can tell what is important in a crisis situation from what really doesn't matter, what must be done today and what can be put off tomorrow. I can see the situation for what it is.

This is not sheer power of the intellect. It is more a matter of sensitivity to what is going on beneath the surface, of insight into people's motives and goals and of having a sense for what is appropriate and fitting for this sort of situation or this kind of person.

Some people seem to come with more of this skill than others. They are more intuitive and seem able quickly to sense these sorts of things. However, even if intuition is stronger in those with such a temperament, it is also something those of us for whom this is not "natural" can learn. We learn it through experience. It is learning to use our eyes, ears, our imagination, our minds and indeed our intuition.

In an organizational context, looking carefully is "reading" the various dimensions or facets of the organization to see what may be generating the situation. For example, we may look into the *structure*

¹³ Thanks to Lewis Smedes, *Choices*, op. cit., p. 114, for the suggestion of these questions, though I have modified them somewhat.

(organizational chart, policies, hierarchy, functional units) to see if the structure fits the tasks that are being engaged. Or, we may look at *the human resources* of the organization (the people, their skill sets, their training, their temperaments and leadership styles). Are the right people in the right places? We may also consider *the political side* of organizational life. Who holds power, and how is power being used? Where are the coalitions of power and influence? What sorts of conflicts are going on? We may look at the more *symbolic and 'cultural' aspects* of the organization. What is the "story" of this organization that it tells itself in answering the questions of why it is in business and is a good place to work? What sorts of "rituals" happen as part of the organization's life? What sorts of stories are told informally to characterize or celebrate the sorts of things that go on?¹⁴

Have we put ourselves "inside" the situation so that we have empathy for the people who are in it? Can we see clearly what is going on? Do we understand the situation because we have listened carefully and observed clearly?

2. Have I interpreted the "question" the situation is asking before "answering" it?

Every situation can be thought of as posing a question to us as we enter it. "What are you going to do about me?" In the same way, people in that situation ask the same of us. "And what are you going to do about me?" Our decisions and actions are an answer to those questions.

When the airplanes were flown into the twin towers in New York City and into the Pentagon in Washington D.C., the President and his cabinet were faced with the question, "What are you going to do about this?" It was not immediately clear what "this" was. Who had done this? What had motivated it? Who was responsible in allowing this to happen? What are the intentions of these people longer term? What is a fitting response to these acts of terrorism? Whatever we may think of the response, President Bush and his team interpreted this situation and went to war, first in Afghanistan and then in Iraq. We have learned since then that they were quite wrong about the situation in Iraq (there were no weapons of mass destruction). Iraq was not a prime actor in the 9/11 incident. They were probably right about Afghanistan.

Sometimes our problem is that we screen out crucial facts that are essential to interpreting clearly the question posed by the situation. We act impulsively and make rash decisions because we have not yet heard the real question the situation poses to us. Sometimes we have a prewritten script to respond to situations, whether or not they differ. It seems there were people in Washington who already wanted to go to war with Iraq and had that game plan already in hand. All they did was to use 9/11 as an excuse to enact that prewritten script.

Lewis Smedes tells the following story that illustrates how we can interpret situations wrongly:

It is half past two on a Sunday morning. My daughter, Cathy, seventeen, went out with the family car, was supposed to be back by midnight. I am out of bed, pacing the floor, worried sick, angry as a caged cat, when I hear the car's tires crunch the pebbled driveway. My daughter walks in the door. I pounce, with words heavy as thunder from the holy mountain—before she opens her mouth. I react to the fact my daughter kept me out of my wits because she did not come home when she promised. The fact, yes, but the uninterpreted fact.

Later that morning I heard the interpretation. One of her friends had gotten into some serious trouble and needed help. Cathy did not feel she could let her friend down and she 'knew' I would not understand if she phoned. So she risked my wrath and stayed with her friend. Maybe she was acting responsibly. I was not.

I acted irresponsibly; I did not give a genuinely human response to the question my daughter's action asked of me at half past two on a Sunday morning. I gave a reaction, not a response, simply because I did not listen long enough to interpret the brute facts of the case.¹⁵

The question is, have we taken the time to **discover a valid interpretation of the situation** we face? If we have listened, observed and have the "facts" in hand, what do we make of them? What is the question being asked of us in the situation?

3. Have I considered whether the words and actions I am going to undertake are appropriate to the setting?

Here is where we realize that there may well be many "right" words and actions. Situations are complex, and often there are a number of different people involved. We may understand the facts, see the dynamics of the situation clearly, interpret the question that situation asks of us sensitively and still see a number of possible lines of action.

¹⁴ See Lee Bolman and Terrence E. Deal, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice and Leadership*, 4th edition (Jossey-Bass, 2008).

¹⁵ Lewis Smedes, op. cit., pp. 99-100.

In discernment and prudence we seek **words and actions that are fitting to the situation**. We as leaders differ from one another in experience, style and many other dimensions. Our role in the setting may also limit what we can say and do, but the “right” thing to do is what good judgment suggests.

If what I am thinking of saying or doing is too much or too little, if it makes people uncomfortable or ill at ease, if it generates fear or anger, it may not be appropriate for the situation. Bad timing and clumsy execution can also ruin an appropriate line of action. Appropriateness is often not a matter of right or wrong but rather just the right amount, not too much or too little, and done at the right time with the right people. Practical wisdom is what we desperately need if we are to get it “right.”

4. Have I used my imagination to penetrate the feelings of people and the possibilities of the setting?

Insight and foresight are important components of this process. If we can say a resounding “yes” to the first three questions, then we should also be able to say we have insight into the feelings of the people involved in the setting. If we have thought well about the consequences of various things to say and do, then we have foresight in anticipating what the future might be like if we conduct ourselves in this or that way.

Part of our problem is that we do not stretch our imagination deeply enough to imagine what people are likely to feel, nor far enough to perceive the likely consequences of a given line of action. It is not simply bad people who hurt others. Good people with good intentions but poor imaginations do it all the time. It is not that they have the wrong rules to follow or failed a course in applied ethics. It simply is a lack of **imagination of what it is like to be in other people’s shoes**. It is blindness to the way certain words and actions play out when unleashed.

Imagination is the insight and foresight of love and justice. It is a key component in intuition. We are not simply following a set of rational procedures and analysis but are tuning into the subtleties of the people and setting. I need to ask myself, before I act, have I used my imagination?

5. If I say or do what I am considering, is it consistent with my commitments and best character and congruent with my roles?

We’ve met integrity before. This question asks that we be sure that the conduct we are considering is well aligned with our values, commitments and the sort of character we wish to develop. Does it honor the commitments I have made to people in the past? Does it also fit with my role in this circle of people?

Commitments are funny things. They are promises we make to people in the face of a changing future. We change. They change. The world around us changes. Our fortune and misfortune change. Yet, our commitments to others are meant to be kept, come fair or foul weather. It is one way we image a God who never breaks promises to us.

Commitments create an island of safety for others. It is one place they can be certain that this person has promised to be with me even if the rest of the world goes berserk. Trust is built on such things. This creates a bonded fabric of strong social relationships. We are connected to people who are reliable, people on whom we can rely, people who care enough to speak the truth in love.

We ask ourselves, can I get emotionally or sexually entangled with this attractive person at work and sustain my commitment I’ve made to my spouse? Can I sell company secrets to its rival and be true to my loyalty to my company? Can I lie to my parents and be true to the implicit life-long bond I have with them? Can I send defective product to a customer and fulfill the pledge made in the contract I signed? If I beat my wife physically, am I keeping my wedding vows to treasure and love her? All of these questions are about commitments we have made explicitly or implicitly.

To be sure there are some commitments that never should be made and, if made, should not be kept. Those who joined the People’s Temple made a commitment to Jim Jones and his church, but they surrendered their will in a way they never should have. Jim Jones was a tyrant and required all members to follow his divine guidance without question. One wonders how many of them wished they had gotten out before that tragic day of November 18, 1978 when 918 of them died in Guyana of poisoned Kool Aid at his hands.¹⁶ Those who joined the Nazi youth movement made a commitment that many never questioned until it was too late.

I may not sell military or state secrets to a country hostile to my own because of my commitment to my country, but I may refuse to join the army to fight in a war instigated by my country because I consider it an unjust war. Not all commitments are equal, and some need to be broken, not kept.

We also need to consider our roles. This consideration deals with our responsibilities and callings. I may be a husband and father, a volunteer fireman, a professor, a Dean, a Sunday school teacher and chair of the missions committee at my church. Each of those roles requires somewhat different things from me. In many ways people get to know us in terms of our roles, and we write the story of our lives through the roles we occupy over time.

¹⁶ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jonestown>

The roles into which we are born or acquire place upon us certain commitments and obligations. I need to ask whether **what I am considering is congruent with my responsibilities, commitments and duties** that are part of the roles I now play. There are some things as a single person I may do that a married person may not. I may go out for a pleasant, romantic evening at a good restaurant with a handsome man in my class or at my office. However, if I am married, such behavior is not congruent with my role as a wife of another man.

Our commitments and obligations place limits on what is right for each of us. It varies from person to person because we vary in the promises we have made and the roles we currently play. However, we must ask if what we are doing or contemplating doing is in harmony with the legitimate commitments we have made and the obligations of the roles we play?

6. Am I willing to let people I care about know what I am doing or saying?

This question is a test of how we truly feel about what we are doing. The test of publicity is not fool proof, but if we are being irresponsible, we are not likely to want our friends and family to know what we are doing.

One can imagine how many bribes and shady deals would not be done if they were shown on the evening TV news program. The light of day has a chastening effect on our temptation to do what we know to be wrong. Would we want someone to know what we say about them behind their back? Could an illicit dalliance with a lover survive if every time we met we were accompanied by people who knew us? Would we fudge our expense reports with extra charges if we knew they would be posted as illegitimate on the company notice board?

Cover-ups are signs that something is wrong. Wanting to hide something we did sounds an alarm about what we said or did. This asks, "Am I **willing for the world to know what I am doing** when no one is watching?"

7. Am I willing to accept the consequences of my conduct?

The last question is about our willingness to stick with the consequences of our choices and actions. Martin Luther King, Jr. was clear on this. Those who came with him to resist unjust laws by breaking them had to be willing to go to jail for such behavior. However evil the law, the responsible thing to do after breaking it was to wait for the police to arrest you. You stick with the choice *and* its consequences.

This is not a sure test of the rightness of a decision, but it is a responsible way to live with the choices you make. As I write, British Petroleum is facing a multiple-billion dollar problem in the Gulf of Mexico. One of its wells is leaking millions of barrels of oil after a rig blew up and collapsed into more than a mile deep of water. BP has said it will pay for the clean-up and all reasonable claims due to damages from this tragedy. They are sticking with their choice—and its consequences—to do this sort of difficult and risky drilling, but only time will tell whether they continue with what they are now stuck or whether money and lawyers will wiggle them out of full responsibility.

This works even for bad choices. In one of the churches I pastored, the treasurer (a chartered accountant who was quite financially comfortable) embezzled money from the church funds. He was also an ordained deacon. When he was confronted with the wrong he had done, he admitted it, was remorseful and set about repaying all the money. The church removed his ordination as deacon and banned him from handling any of the money or books of the church. He could not undo the wrongness of his choice, but by accepting the consequences of his choice, he brought some good out of the bad.

We face this all the time. We choose to marry this person but later discover they are not as scintillating, fun and wonderful as we thought. Do we divorce them and move on to someone else we think is a "better" choice? What does a couple who does not want to have children do when they suddenly find themselves pregnant? We know the "pill" and other contraceptives are not 100% effective. We would think them as acting responsibly if they decide to keep the child, love it and bring it up. We act responsibly when we stick with what we are stuck with.

This final question ends our quick check-list for discernment. Our choices are responsible ones when we are **willing to accept the consequences of our choices and conduct.**

Here are the questions in one short list:

1. Have I taken time to listen sensitively and look carefully in my situation?
2. Have I interpreted the "question" the situation is asking before "answering" it?
3. Have I considered whether the words and actions I am going to undertake are appropriate to the setting?
4. Have I used my imagination to penetrate the feelings of people and the possibilities of the setting?
5. If I say or do what I am considering, is it consistent with my commitments and best character and congruent with my roles?
6. Am I willing to let people I care about know what I am doing or saying?

7. Am I willing to accept the consequences of my conduct?

Think About It

Answer Box # 6

If you were to pick two of these seven questions as the most helpful or challenging to you as you seek to live more responsibly and faithfully, which would they be? Why?

Models: Abigail

Abigail's name means "joy of her father," and she certainly was the joy of her father. She displays uncanny wisdom and unerring judgment. She was a woman of real wisdom. In the Old Testament the wisdom paradigm focuses on character, the well-formed habits that enable a person to make prudent and righteous decisions in all the affairs of everyday life. Despite all the struggles, confusions and suffering that afflict life, we can live rightly and become righteous. The wise move confidently but always within the limits of knowing that this is a God-ordered universe and history. We do not have definitive answers, and many things remain mysterious. Nevertheless, God is in control, and we can live confidently before him.

How to live with fools and deal with angry men (I Samuel 25)

Bible reading: Read the above biblical text before continuing the module below.

We can readily understand how Abigail was the joy of her father. She turns out to be Nabal's best asset. We could call this story the "beauty and the beast" except that our understanding of beauty is different from that of the Israelites. Abigail is described by two words; she is beautiful and intelligent. Males were also called beautiful. David is so described in I Samuel 16:12. Abigail is more than a pretty face and a good figure.

We would say that she was a beautiful person with a superior understanding that goes far beyond simply a high IQ. It is difficult to fathom how her father could have married her off to Nabal (whose name means "fool"). Yet, we recognize that marriages were arranged by parents in this day, and a match with a very wealthy family was good family politics. Young ladies had little say in whom they married.

We do not know how Nabal got his name or nickname, but he fit it. This man is one of the reckless, good-for-nothings we find in every community. However, he was very rich, so rich he could host a feast on the scale of a king. However, the greater his wealth grew, the greater his arrogance grew. He was a man with a full purse and an empty head. Everything was about him. He was miserly, mean and macho.

Abigail was an assertive and sensitive spirit, a woman of action. When she was told what Nabal had said to David's emissaries, she sprang into action with daring and courage like Queen Esther. She sized up the situation, seized the moment and saved the day. She had to act quickly when there was no time to persuade her drunken husband. (v. 36) Without being weak or sentimental, she placed herself between David and Nabal's household, putting herself in jeopardy. In this way she sought to delay or stop what she foresaw as the inevitable result of Nabal's foolish insults.

When she met David, she exercised humility, eloquence and wisdom that we don't see even in David. Her speech is one of the great speeches of the Bible. Her words stilled the demon of anger in David. Before she spoke, we see David muttering revenge as he led 400 men with their swords clanking on their thighs. After she was done, we see David transformed, a man giving thanks to God and blessing this woman for keeping him from a foolish and ill-considered slaughter. She is in the clearest terms, a *peacemaker*, for her words and actions prevent imminent bloodshed. In this she is a joy to her Father in heaven.

- **Her ethical challenge:** To mediate peace between her family and David's angry warriors.
- **Her ethical action:** To apologize, speak persuasively and offer tokens of peace.
- **Her temptation:** To write off her husband as a fool and let him suffer the consequences of his folly.
- **The cost of her doing what was right:** To risk being the first to be cut down by the angry sword of David and his warriors.
- **The reward of her doing what was right:** To eventually become one of David's wives in his royal household.

When we look at her actions, we can learn from the pattern she utilizes. Her conduct displays real character and wisdom in dealing with a volatile and violent situation. Perhaps her dealing with angry

people is summed up in the words of Proverbs 15:1: “A gentle answer turns away wrath but a harsh word stirs up anger.” How do we answer softly and gently? Abigail shows us self-control at three levels toward both David and Nabal.

1. She controlled her spirit. She was not paralyzed by the very real rage of David or the clanking swords of his four hundred men. She had an inner calm that was rooted in a reality that could not be seen and was not drawn from her circumstances. It was inside her, a part of being a person who is intelligent and discerning. She could see what she had to do under dire circumstances. She may have been a desperate housewife, but she was full of discernment and courage.

The first thing a leader needs to learn in dealing with angry people is this: you don't have to be an angry person yourself. You don't have to accept their anger and give it back. However, if you are not already full of something else, they will pour their anger inside of you, and you will explode in reaction. Control your spirit. It simply is not true that if you are a Christ-follower you can't help yourself or that you find you are “beside yourself.” The Spirit of power dwells within you if you are of Christ.

2. She controlled her steps. She was not passive. She set a plan into motion immediately upon discovering the folly of Nabal. This chapter has a number of references in the Hebrew to the phrase “made haste” (“lost no time” in v. 18; “quickly” in vv. 23, 24, 42). She loads up donkeys with supplies and set them out ahead of her. When she comes to the meeting place, she bows down to the ground and shows honor to David. She honors him in her gestures. She gives David his due respect, whatever she might have thought of him.

Leaders need not only to control what is going on inwardly but also what they do. Be active, not passive in an aggravating situation where anger has taken over due to foolishness.

3. She controlled her speech. She was persuasive. Clearly she had thought out what she needed to say in this circumstance, not only to David but also to her husband, Nabal. Look at what she does with her words—she takes the blame upon herself, even while dissociating herself from her partner's action and words. She reminds David of his identity and future, and pictures what his slaughter of Nabal and his household would do to that future. He would come to the throne with the reputation of a blood-thirsty bandit, a murderer who couldn't endure foolish insults. What we say in angry situations is probably the key to what happens. Think about how she spoke.

- *She spoke at the right time.* She intercepted David well before he was standing before the household compound, speaking to him before he might get into a shouting match with Nabal, before he might lose face again. She meets him without bringing the offensive party with her. As for Nabal, she does not speak to him before she sets her plan in motion to halt David's anger. She waits until Nabal's fulminating insults have cooled. She waits until his 'kingly' drunkenness was over and he was sober. She chooses the morning to inform him.
- *She spoke with the right tone.* We see this in her interaction with David. It was a gentle answer with no defensiveness or self-righteousness. The apology is direct, without rationalization or excuse. It is laced with humility and transparency. Seven times she calls herself his servant; fourteen times she calls him my Lord. She says “Please” or “I pray” in verses 24, 25, and 28, a tone not quite captured in the NIV translation.
- *She spoke the right truth.* She coaxes David to think theologically, morally and historically. She didn't simply flatter David but spoke the truth that David knew and that Samuel had forecast about his future. It was just the thing David needed to hear to cool his anger and set him back on the path of self-control. With Nabal, she didn't hide anything. It was shocking truth.

What more can you ask of your own speech in tense situations but the right time, the right tone and the right truth? Do that, and you will show yourself a wise and honorable person—and you will show real leadership.

Think about it

Answer Box # 7

In what ways do you see Abigail as “morally fit” and exercising discernment and prudence?

Summary

Ethical Foundations: Unit 4 - How Do We Make Sense of What to Do in Real Life?

This unit has focused on how we discern the right thing to do as we face everyday life. God has a good, pleasing and perfect will for our lives. It is not something that constricts us and presses us into a corner of constant anxiety about what we are doing. It is a will that frees us to live joyfully and fully. We explored the notions of discernment, conscience, prudence and intuition as elements of making sense of our world and our choices. Discernment is something in which we can improve as we gain experience and maturity. It is also, like intuition, something that can be modeled and mentored. The end of the unit provides a list of seven key questions we can ask ourselves as we make important decisions and choices in our lives. Abigail serves as our exemplar. She showed prudence in a situation of crisis. She intuitively seemed to know what to do without hesitation. She sprang into action and diffused a very volatile situation and a very angry David.

Garry Friesen offers a helpful perspective on the reality that much of life is lived without a clearly revealed, specific will of God for every choice:

“If we are obedient to the revealed will of God, then we are in a position to understand his will where it is not revealed.”¹⁷

Unit 4 Final Assignment

Final Assignment

1. Write on one to two pages your thoughts about the key elements from this lesson that you find helpful in determining how you make sense of what is right for you to do as you move through your ordinary days and weeks.
2. On another one to two pages write as a Christian leader write about your own formation in the virtue of “prudence.” As you look over your own history, have you had good mentoring and modeling in making prudent choices? Do you see yourself as more prone to impulsiveness or indecision? What has helped you most in becoming more prudent?
3. Please confirm that you have discussed the results of your interactive work in Unit 4 (“Think About It” boxes) with a group of two other people. (See “Note on Process” on page v in the “Expectations for the Course” section in the Introduction to the Course.)
1. 4. Have you read Stott, 269-321 Celebrating Ethnic Diversity; Simplicity, Gen. & Contentment. If Stott is right about these issues, what should that mean for you practically? Write another page of reflection.

When your work is complete (three to five pages total), send a copy to your facilitator via email as an attachment. Please send it by the date indicated in the Module Calendar.

READING

Peter Kreeft: **Does God have one right choice for me in each decision I make?**¹⁸

When we pray for wisdom to discern God's will when it comes to choosing a mate, a career, a job change, a move, a home, a school, a friend, a vacation, how to spend money, or any other choice, big or little, whenever there are two or more different paths opening up before us and we have to choose, does God always will one of those paths for us? If so, how do we discern it?

Many Christians who struggle with this question today are unaware that Christians of the past can help them from their own experience. Christian wisdom embodied in the lives and teachings of the saints tells us two things that are relevant to this question.

First, they tell us that God not only knows and loves us in general but that he cares about every detail of our lives, and we are to seek to walk in his will in all things, big and little. Second, they tell us that he has given us free will and reason because he wants us to use it to make decisions. This tradition is exemplified in Saint Augustine's famous motto "Love God and [then] do what you will." In other words, if you truly love God and his will, then doing what you will, will, in fact, be doing what God wills.

Do these two pieces of advice pull us in opposite directions, or do they only seem to? Since there is obviously a great truth embodied in both of them, which do we emphasize the most to resolve our question of whether God has one right way for us?

If you truly love God and his will, then doing what you will, will, in fact, be doing what God wills.

¹⁷ With J. Robin Maxim, *Decision-making and the Will of God: A Biblical Alternative to the Traditional View* (Portland: Multnomah Books, 2004)

¹⁸ By Peter Kreeft, accessed April 1, 2010: <http://www.peterkreeft.com/topics/discernment.htm>. Used by permission. Ethics For Living and Leading, Version 3.0

Ethical Foundations: Unit 4 - How Do We Make Sense of What to Do in Real Life?

I think the first and most obvious answer to this question is that it depends on which people are asking it. We have a tendency to emphasize one half of the truth at the expense of the other half, and we can do that in either of the two ways. Every heresy in the history of theology fits this pattern: for instance, emphasizing Christ's divinity at the expense of his humanity or his humanity at the expense of his divinity; or emphasizing divine sovereignty at the expense of free will or free will at the expense of divine sovereignty.

Five general principles of discernment of God's will that apply to all questions about it, and therefore to our question too, are the following:

1. *Always begin with data*, with what we know for sure. Judge the unknown by the known, the uncertain by the certain. Adam and Eve neglected that principle in Eden and ignored God's clear command and warning for the devil's promised pig in a poke.
2. *Let your heart educate your mind*. Let your love of God educate your reason in discerning his will. Jesus teaches this principle in John 7:17 to the Pharisees. (Would that certain Scripture scholars today would heed it!) They were asking how they could interpret his words, and he gave them the first principle of hermeneutics (the science of interpretation): "If your will were to do the will of my Father, you would understand my teaching." The saints understand the Bible better than the theologians, because they understand its primary author, God, by loving him with their whole heart and their whole mind.
3. *Have a soft heart but a hard head*. We should be "wise as serpents and harmless as doves," sharp as a fox in thought but loyal as a dog in will and deed. Soft-heartedness does not excuse soft-headedness, and hard-headedness does not excuse hard-heartedness. In our hearts we should be "bleeding-heart liberals" and in our heads "stuck-in-the-mud conservatives."
4. *All God's signs should line up*, by a kind of trigonometry. There are at least seven such signs: (1) Scripture, (2) church teaching, (3) human reason (which God created), (4) the appropriate situation, or circumstances (which he controls by his providence), (5) conscience, our innate sense of right and wrong, (6) our individual personal bent or desire or instincts, and (7) prayer. Test your choice by holding it up before God's face. If one of these seven voices says no, don't do it. If none say no, do it.
5. *Look for the fruits of the spirit*, especially the first three: love, joy, and peace. If we are angry and anxious and worried, loveless and joyless and peaceless, we have no right to say we are sure of being securely in God's will. Discernment itself should not be a stiff, brittle, anxious thing, but—since it too is part of God's will for our lives—loving and joyful and peace-filled, more like a game than a war, more like writing love letters than taking final exams.

Now to our question. Does God have just one right choice for me to make each time? If so, I must find it. If not, I should relax more and be a little looser. Here are some clues to the answer.

The answer depends on what kind of person you are. I assume that many readers of this page are (1) Catholic, (2) orthodox and faithful to the teachings of the church, (3) conservative, and (4) charismatic. I have had many friends—casual, close, and very close—of this description for many years. In fact, I fit the description myself. So I speak from some experience when I say that people of this type have a strong tendency toward a certain character or personality type—which is in itself neither good nor bad—which needs to be nourished by one of these emphases more than the other. The opposite personality type would require the opposite emphasis.

My first clue, based on my purely personal observation of this kind of people, is that we often get bent out of human shape by our desire—in itself a very good desire—to find God's perfect will for us. We give a terrible testimony to non-Christians; we seem unable to relax, to stop and smell God's roses, to enjoy life as God gives it to us. We often seem fearful, fretful, terribly serious, humorless, and brittle—in short, the kind of people that don't make a very good advertisement for our faith.

**Relax.
Enjoy life.**

I am not suggesting that we compromise one iota of our faith to appeal to unbelievers. I am simply suggesting that we be human. Go watch a ball game. Enjoy a drink—just one—unless you're at risk for alcoholism. Be a little silly once in a while. Tickle your kids—and your wife. Learn how to tell a good joke. Read Frank Schaeffer's funny novel *Portofino*. Go live in Italy for a while.

Here's a second clue. Most Christians, including many of the saints, don't, in fact, have the discernment we are asking about, the knowledge of what God wills in every single choice. It's rare. Could something as important as this be so rare? Could God have left almost all of us so clueless?

**Most do not have
knowledge of
God's will in
every single
choice.**

A third clue is Scripture. It records some examples—most of them miraculous, many of them spectacular—of God revealing his particular will. But these are reported in the same vein as miracles: as something remarkable, not as general policy. The "electronic gospel" of health and wealth, "name it and claim it," is unscriptural, and so is the notion that we must find the one right answer to every practical problem, for the same reason: we are simply never assured such a blanket promise.

Darkness and uncertainty are as common in the lives of the saints, in Scripture as well as afterwards, as pain and poverty are. The only thing common to all humanity that the gospel guarantees to free us from is sin (and its consequences, death, guilt, and fear), not suffering *and not uncertainties*. If God had wanted us to know the clear, infallible way, he surely would have told us clearly and infallibly.

The gospel frees us from sin and its consequences, but not suffering and uncertainties.

A fourth clue is something God did in fact give us: free will. Why? There are a number of good reasons—for instance, so that our love could be infinitely more valuable than instinctive, unfree animal affection. But I think I see another reason. As a teacher, I know that I sometimes should withhold answers from my students so that they find them themselves, and thus appreciate and remember them better—and also learn how to exercise their own judgment in finding answers themselves. "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." God gave us some big fish, but he also gave us the freedom to fish for a lot of little ones (and some big ones) ourselves.

God wants his chorus to sing in harmony, but not in unison.

Reason and free will always go together. God created both in us as part of his image. He gives supernatural revelation to both: dogmas to our reason and commandments to our will. But just as he didn't give us all the answers, even in theology, in applying the dogmas or drawing out the consequences of them, so he didn't give us all the answers in morality or practical guidance, in applying the commandments and drawing out their consequences. He gave us the mental and moral equipment with which to do that, and he is not pleased when we bury our talent in the ground instead of investing it so that he will see how much it has grown in us when he returns.

In education, I know there are always two extremes. You can be too modern, too experimental, too Deweyan, too structureless. But you can also be too classical, too rigid. Students need initiative and creativity and originality too. God's law is short. He gave us ten commandments, not ten thousand. Why? Why not a more complete list of specifics? Because he wanted freedom and variety. Why do you think he created so many persons? Why not just one? Because he loves different personalities. He wants his chorus to sing in harmony, but not in unison.

I know Christians who are cultivating ingrown eyeballs trying to know themselves so well—often by questionable techniques like the enneagram, or Oriental modes of prayer—so that they can make the decision that is exactly what God wants for them every time. I think it is much healthier to think about God and your neighbor more and yourself less, to forget yourself—follow your instincts without demanding to know everything about them. As long as you love God and act within his law, I think he wants you to play around a bit.

As long as you love God and act within his law, he wants you to play around a bit.

I'm happily haunted by Chesterton's image of the playground fence erected around the children on top of the mountain so that they could play without fear of falling off the side. That's why God gave us his law: not to make us worried but to keep us safe so that we could play the great games of life and love and joy.

Each of us has a different set of instincts and desires. Sin infects them, of course. But sin infects our reason and our bodies too; yet we are supposed to follow our bodily instincts (for example, hunger and self-preservation) and our mind's instincts (for example, curiosity and logic). I think he wants us to follow our hearts. Surely, if John loves Mary more than Susan, he has more reason to think God is leading him to marry Mary than Susan. Why not treat all other choices by the same principle?

I am not suggesting, of course, that our hearts are infallible, or that following them justifies sinful behavior. Nor am I suggesting that the heart is the *only* thing to follow. I mentioned seven guidelines earlier. But surely it is God who designed our hearts—the spiritual heart with desire and will as much as the physical heart with aorta and valves. Our parents are sinful and fallible guides too, but God gave them to us to follow. So our hearts can be worth following too even though they are sinful and fallible. If your heart loves God, it is worth following. If it doesn't, then you're not interested in the problem of discernment of his will anyway.

Here is a fifth clue. When we do follow Augustine's advice to "love God and then do what you will," we usually experience great relief and peace. Peace is a mark of the Holy Spirit. I know a few people who have abandoned Christianity altogether because they lacked that peace. They tried to be super-Christians in everything, and the pressure was just unendurable. They should have read Galatians.

Peace is a mark of the Holy Spirit.

Here is a sixth clue. If God has one right choice in everything you do, then you can't draw any line. That means that God wants you to know which room to clean first, the kitchen or the bedroom, and which dish to pick up first, the plate or the saucer. You see, if you carry out this principle's logical implications, it shows itself to be ridiculous, unlivable, and certainly not the kind of life God wants for us—the kind described in the Bible and the lives of the saints.

Goodness is multicolored. Only pure evil lacks color and variety.

Clue number six is the principle that many diverse things are good; that good is plural. Even for the same person, there are often two or more choices that are both good. Good is kaleidoscopic. Many roads are right. The road to the beach is right and the road to the mountains is right, for God awaits us in both places. Goodness is multicolored. Only pure evil lacks color and variety. In hell there is no color, no individuality. Souls are melted down like lead, or chewed up together in Satan's mouth. The two most uniform places on earth are prisons and armies, not the church.

Take a specific instance where different choices are both equally good. Take married sex. As long as you stay within God's law—no adultery, no cruelty, no egotism, no unnatural acts, as, for example, contraception—anything goes. Use your imagination. Is there one and only one way God wants you to make love to your spouse? What a silly question! Yet making love to your spouse is a great good, and God's will. He wants you to decide to be tender or wild, moving or still, loud or quiet, so that your spouse knows it's you, not anyone else, not some book who's deciding.

Clue number seven is an example from my own present experience. I am writing a novel for the first time, and learning how to do it. First, I placed it in God's hands, told him I wanted to do it for his kingdom, and trusted him to lead me. Then, I simply followed my own interests, instincts, and unconscious. I let the story tell itself and the characters become themselves. God doesn't stop me or start me. He doesn't do my homework for me. But he's there, like a good parent.

God writes the story of our lives with the pen strokes of our own free choices.

I think living is like writing a novel. It's writing the story of your own life and even your own self (for you shape your self by all your choices, like a statue that is its own sculptor). God is the primary author, of course, the primary sculptor. But he uses different human means to get different human results. He is the primary author of each book in the Bible too, but the personality of each human author is no less clear there than in secular literature.

God is the universal storyteller. He wants many different stories. And he wants you to thank him for the unique story that comes from your free will and your choices too. Because your free will and his eternal plan are not two competing things, but two sides of one thing. We cannot fully understand this great mystery in this life, because we see only the underside of the tapestry. But in heaven, I think, one of the things we will praise and thank God the most for is how wildly and wonderfully and dangerously he put the driving wheel of our life into our hands—like a parent teaching a young child to drive.

You see, we have to learn that, because the cars are much bigger in heaven. There, we will rule angels and kingdoms.

God, in giving us all free will, said to us: "Your will be done." Some of us turn back to him and say: "My will is that your will be done." That is obedience to the first and greatest commandment. Then, when we do that, he turns to us and says: "And now, *your* will be done." And then he writes the story of our lives with the pen strokes of our own free choices.

Ethics for Living and Leading

Unit 5

How Do We Make Ethical Decisions?



Development Associates International

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Unit 5 - How Do We Make Ethical Decisions?

Steps along the way to ethical action

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Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this unit you will be able to:

- Indicate the nine steps involved in ethical analysis;
- Be able to apply them to specific case studies;
- Describe some of the issues involved in the cultural conditioning of values and priorities.

Steps to Complete Unit 5

Be sure to review carefully the RESOLVEDD steps for ethical analysis and understand them.

Readings are included at the end of most units. These texts provide biblical and cultural framework for an adequate understanding of Christian ethics. Please reflect and respond as indicated in assignments found within the texts.

Supplementary text: John R. W. Stott, Issues Facing Christians Today, 4th Edition (Zondervan, 2006). For Unit 5, please read 71-94 "Our Plural World: Is Christian Witness Influential?"

Lecture Notes & Workbook

Introduction & Overview

Bernard Adeney tells a story of a cross-cultural situation that raised ethical issues

One day during a class on cross-cultural ethics in Berkeley, California, one of my students excused himself at the break to make a call to Haiti. He was facing a crisis that required an immediate decision. In the hour following the break he shared his story with the class. 'James' is a fundraiser for a Christian development organization in Two-Thirds World countries.

James had organized a team of physicians, nurses and other health-care professionals to visit Haiti for several weeks and set up rural clinics. The health needs of the poverty-stricken people were extreme, and the clinics were expected to offer help that in some cases would be life-saving. The team was made up of Christians who had donated their time and expenses. Arrangements for the clinics had been made by local Haitian churches. Airline tickets for the team of twenty-five people had been purchased at a cost of thousands of dollars. They were discounted tickets and could not be refunded or changed. Thousands of dollars' worth of medical supplies had been shipped to Haiti months beforehand. The team was due to fly to Haiti that weekend.

The problem was that the medical supplies had been sitting on the dock in customs for weeks. The main Haitian organizer, a pastor, said customs officials were waiting for a bribe. Appeals had been made to higher officials, but to no avail. Time was running out. Because the stakes were so high, the Haitian pastor urged James to authorize a substantial payment immediately. Without the supplies the clinics could not be set up. So much work and so much potential good being in the balance.

But if James authorized the bribe, how could he live with his conscience? Wouldn't his participation in corruption undermine the credibility of his organization and contradict the integrity of the Gospel? What kind of person would give, or not give, an extralegal gift to customs officials¹

Think About It

Answer Box # 1

James has to make this decision by himself in the next few hours. What would you advise him to do and why?

"How do we respond when we find ourselves not only in a situation with conflicting values but conflicting cultural understandings? In this case the term 'bribe' already signals that James sees this situation as one involving corruption. James cannot make a good decision in this case without knowing what such an act means in the cultural situation in Haiti, not the situation in North America. But even if he did, the virtues expected by the Haitian pastor (wisdom, compassion and generosity in giving a gift to the customs officials?) conflict with the virtues of his culture (honesty, legality, justice?).²

This story raises the question, what are the things we need to consider in weighing the relative merits of one decision or action against those of others? What goes into being wise and prudent as we seek to incarnate the life of Christ in our social and cultural worlds? Sometimes the clarity of our principles and core values (to which we are fully committed) do not seem to match the complex and conflicting values that are at stake in given situations.

How do we sort the issues and come to decisions when the situation we face requires mature, thoughtful and faithful action? How do we begin to spell out the implications of the guidance we have in the Sermon on the Mount, in the Ten Commandments and in the rest of Scripture?

¹ *Strange Virtues: Ethics in a Multicultural World*, 1995, pp. 13-14

² *Op.cit.*, p. 15.

Ethical Foundations: Unit 5 - How Do We Make Ethical Decisions?

In many cases, we respond to points of decision on the basis of the wisdom, cultural priorities and values and, yes, Scripture that seem to be relevant. Often we do so almost intuitively, without much conscious thought. We already “know” the fitting thing, the right thing to do. However, we also find ourselves in situations and facing decisions where we are off balance. We don’t know the best thing to do much less the right thing. Our intuition fails us since we cannot match this new situation with past ones. We then have to be more explicit and conscious in thinking through all the alternatives. In some cases we are doing a “post-mortem” on a decision we made that went awry, and we need to learn what we did wrong.

There are a number of practical methods for working on situations where ethical decision making is necessary. The method presented in this course is based on a strategy developed by Pfeiffer and Forsberg for general ethical reflection.³ We use it with Christian and biblical materials as part of that process. The source of our framework for understanding what is at stake in life comes from our understanding of God and God’s will for human life in Scripture, so we have modified the method somewhat.

Pfeiffer and Forsberg’s method for ethical analysis is called RESOLVEDD (using key letters of each step). We have modified it so that our reference to biblical and Christian themes is explicit. These steps are not necessarily in a precise order to be followed like the steps in a staircase. Some may be taken out of the order listed below, yet all steps need to be done for understanding an ethical issue/situation. They are listed as follows with a brief explanation of each:

1. **R**eview the history, background and details of the case, seeking a clear understanding of the situation.
2. State the **E**thical problems or dilemmas that are involved that present themselves in this case or situation.
3. Identify the major possible **S**olutions to the ethical dilemma or choices inherent in the situation.
4. Identify the likely **O**utcomes, results/impacts or consequences for each possible choice or decision.
5. Identify the **L**ikely impact of each solution on people’s lives.
6. Identify the **V**alues that are upheld or violated by following each of the possible choices or decisions. (these may be cultural, rational, or scriptural -- or all three). Here is where the principles drawn from Scripture or rooted in the great commandment of love are applicable.
7. **E**valuate each main solution, its consequences and how it relates to the principles of Scripture and the values at stake. Compare the possible solutions and weigh them.
8. **D**ecide which solution is the best: state it, clarify its details, and justify it.
9. **D**efend the decision against the major objections that can be raised about its main weaknesses.

For the most part, RESOLVEDD is a method for working on “right against right” *dilemmas*, though it can be used for “right against wrong” situations where we should be clear on the right thing to do, if we are wise and mature Christ-followers. Often when we know what is right we are not clear on how to implement it, how to deal with all the relationships (and people) involved and the issues at stake. Therefore, this method is relevant even for “right against wrong” situations because our hesitation to act may rest on how to implement what we know is the right thing to do. We don’t want to do the right thing in such a way that it undermines the very “rightness” of what we are doing. The more we find ourselves in a cross-cultural situation, the more complexity attends our understanding of what is the right *thing* to do and what is the right *way* to do it. We need to be concerned not only with ethical *correctness* but contextual *appropriateness*.

In practice, considerable time is required to complete a full analysis of an ethical situation, yet ethical conflicts or dilemmas may come at us in crisis times when we must make quick decisions. In an earlier unit we talked about becoming ethically “fit” in analogy to physical fitness. Ethical “fitness” means we have gained enough wisdom, experience and team members that we are ready to make very quick decisions because we are clear on our ethical principles and we are knowledgeable about typical human conduct. Ethical “fitness” also means we have the inner fortitude and steadfastness to do what we know is right even when there are strong pressures against doing what is right. Ethical “fitness” comes only with time, experience and the development of an inner core of trusted colleagues who can give good, sage advice when we must reflect quickly on a crisis situation and act with wisdom, justice and love. With

³ Pfeiffer and Forsberg, *Ethics on the Job: Cases and Strategies*, Second Edition, Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 2000, pp. 32-43.

ethical fitness comes greater ability to discern what is happening, to intuit the path that needs to be followed and to have the prudence (practical) wisdom on how to do the right thing in the right way.

Nevertheless, RESOLVEDD is a strategy that helps get to that point of ethical “fitness.” As you develop facility with using this method of thinking, you will find that you need less time to develop an ethical analysis. You will need less time to cover the more routine steps of the method. With time and practice you will discover that each new ethical conflict will become less novel and require less time for analysis. The first things we need to consider are the values and principles that we use in identifying the ethical issues in life. We will spend much more time in later units looking at the range of values and principles involved in Christian ethics.

Values and Principles Often Used

Before we look at a specific case to understand how this method is used, we want to set a larger context. People see ethical issues because they approach life with some sense of right and wrong, often embedded in their consciences. Certainly as Christians we approach life with our ethical vision shaped by the instruction of Scripture—by the whole of Scripture but often especially by the Sermon on the Mount and the Ten Commandments.

In the larger society in general, there are some widely shared values and principles that may have been influenced by Christian or other religious perspectives. These value judgments are applicable to a wide range of cases, not simply one particular example or case. Ethical principles and values are important because they give us criteria for thinking about decisions and actions.

People disagree about such values and principles and at times they even disagree about how shared principles apply and whether or not they are relevant to a given decision or action. People may disagree about how the principle is formulated, or they may not think a given principle is the most important when there are several that might apply.

As a leader you will find yourself in situations where people bring different notions and ways of talking about the “ethics” of a given case. Sometimes you will find yourself in a context where quoting Scripture or insisting on using “Christian” language is counterproductive or even prohibited. This does not mean you no longer bring a Christian worldview or articulate the best solution that fits well with a Christian approach. However, you may need to use more general, so-called “neutral” terminology. This is the case with the United Nations and other contexts where people of different cultures and religions cooperate to take steps to improve life for all humans on this planet.

Therefore, it is helpful to become acquainted with some of the “neutral” languages and approaches to ethics found in pluralistic contexts. You will often find this sort of language in the Codes of Conduct or Ethical Policies drawn up by various organizations, businesses or professions. There is much to commend in them, even if they are not explicitly from a Christian perspective.⁴

1. The Equal Consideration of Interest (ECI)

One of the most widely shared general approaches to ethics is the equal consideration of interest (ECI). This is the principle:

You should make judgments and decisions and act in ways that treat the interests and well-being of others as no less important than your own.⁵

You might note that this is a principle that echoes the “Golden Rule.”⁶ This is the ethical principle requiring that we treat others with the same consideration and justice we want for ourselves. It is the most important principle underlying the development of modern human rights. You need to remember this principle because it is very useful in organizational ethics.

ECI does not require that we sacrifice our own interests. A fully developed Christian ethic goes beyond recognizing the interests and well-being of others as “no less important” to a requirement of self-sacrifice. It means we treat the interests and well-being of others *as important as our own*. This requires fairness and impartiality (not indifference) in our dealings with other people. Our own personal likes and dislikes, our own preferences and goals are not to govern our decisions. Rather we are to count the other person’s interests and well-being as having as much importance in deciding and acting as our own interests and concerns.

ECI also requires that you use the same principles and values that you apply to yourself when you are making decisions and taking actions involving others. If you believe something would be wrong if done to you, then it would be wrong for you to do it to another. The ethical person is one who applies the

⁴ Unit 12 offers a number of resources, including examples of Codes of Conduct from a variety of different professions and organizations.

⁵ Pfeiffer and Forsberg, op. cit.

⁶ Matthew 7:12. This notion is found widely in various forms. Appendix B provides a small sampling of this principle from a variety of sources.

same principles of living in a way that recognizes the equal moral value of other lives and the well-being of others. In many ways, it is an application of the principles of justice and fairness.

Under this principle of ECI, an ethical decision is one that (1) implements an ethical approach that is in line with equal consideration of all parties involved; (2) compromises ethical values and principles as little as is reasonably and ethically possible; and (3) allows you (or your organization) to achieve your goals to as great an extent as is compatible with (1) and (2).

We then have to ask, what are some other principles and values that we use as we seek to implement the “golden rule” or ECI? We will take that up in the next section.

Think About It

Answer Box # 2

How do you respond to this generally used ethical viewpoint (ECI)? Do you think it fits well with a Christian approach to ethics? Why or why not?

2. A Short List of Widely Shared Values/Principles

Now we will address “rules” or principles that are particularly useful in applying ECI to a specific context. You will see that a number of these rules are values or principles have a direct connection with instructions from the Ten Commandments or the Sermon on the Mount, even when they do not go quite as far as a Christian ethic might. We will not treat “justice” directly here because it is such a dominant and important principle, along with love, in all Christian ethics. Here are some others to which people often appeal when creating ethical codes:

A. Honesty: Do not deceive people.

This principle underlies the reality that trust is the cement that glues organizations and society together. If you cannot trust the other person, you will undertake measures to ensure that you know what is true and are basing your decisions and actions on the truth. If you are unsure, you may decide not to participate or cooperate. Honesty is basic to communication, cooperation and other necessary social activities.

Truth-telling is violated by lying or even half-truths told with the intent to mislead. At times, even silence can be a lie. In addition, the use of body language, facial expressions and tone of voice can mislead. Of course, withholding information does not automatically violate this principle. There are types of information people have no right to know. You can refuse to share given information and be forthright in telling the questioner that you will not tell them such information.

B. Benevolence: Do No Harm.

This is a rather negative principle. It does not require us to do anything, just to refrain from any decision or action that would harm others or damage their projects, efforts or property. It does not require that we positively foster their well-being. It is a minimal principle. At the least, do not harm them. We have a strong duty to do nothing directly or indirectly that might harm another and worsen their lives. In some ways, this minimal value undergirds the other values in this list. We are forthcoming with the truth because we want people to make decisions on the basis of reality. We keep commitments (fidelity) because others are counting on us and we may harm them if we are not loyal to our commitments.

C. Fidelity: Fulfill your commitments and act faithfully.

This value is very familiar to Christians. It also aligns with honesty and truth-telling. As Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, “All you need to say is ‘Yes,’ or ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.” (Matthew 5:17) The point is that we are to be faithful to the word we have given so that people will know that oaths and contracts are unnecessary for us. We do what we say, and we say what we mean. Our word is our bond of commitment. We fulfill the pledges and promises we have made.

We fulfill our special obligations when we take up social roles such as spouse, parent, accountant or teacher. We may not have made a verbal commitment to certain conduct, but in assuming a given role, we carry it out with fidelity to its highest standards. There are many sorts of commitments we undertake. To some commitments we sign our names in writing. Others involve contracts. In some relationships there are implied contracts where expectations and arrangements may be unwritten and unsigned but are just as real.

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Fidelity takes many forms and depends upon the situation. Fidelity within the family means fulfilling our responsibilities as parent, child, in-law, niece or nephew, respecting privacy and providing emotional support and help. Fidelity in the workplace means following standard procedures, abiding by the mission and vision of the organization, keeping a clear distinction between our personal property and that of the organization and respecting lines of authority. Fidelity to our subordinates means being honest with them when there is a performance problem, being fair and equitable in our treatment of them and acting to support their flourishing and growth.

Fidelity to the organization for which we work involves loyalty to it and its interests but fidelity is not the highest value. We cannot be faithful to the extent that we are willing to do illegal things to advance the interests of others or the company. Fidelity requires that we do more than simply “no harm.” It means we foster the positive well-being of those with whom we are in relationship.

D. Autonomy: Enable others to act in informed, considered ways.

This principle values the ability of people to be free, not coerced, and self-directed in their decisions and actions. Autonomous people are responsible for their own actions and deserve praise or blame. This principle also fits well with honesty. People need to be informed with the sort of information that allows them to take considered, reasonable action. One way to harm people is to keep vital information from them that they need in order to further their goals and interests. Fidelity also contributes to autonomy. If people cannot count on our word and pledges, we restrict their freedom. We help free people's decisions and actions when we make contracts with them that they can act upon, confident that we will keep our side of the bargain. Putting these contracts in writing provides assurance that we are committed to certain deliverables and actions in the future.

This principle is often violated by people who are manipulating others or want to ensure that someone acts the way they want them to act. By withholding key information or deceiving the other, a person can indirectly coerce action. Using exaggeration, lying, issuing threats or perpetrating physical violence are ways of restricting the autonomy of others. Taking advantage of the desperate situations in which the poor find themselves can be another way of violating this principle.

E. Lawfulness: Obey the laws and regulations.

There is a duty to follow duly enacted and constituted legal rules and regulations. This is not the final arbiter of the ethical. We are not duty-bound to follow an unjust or arbitrary statute. The more laws are enacted in a democratic manner through due process, the greater legitimacy they have. Most laws are justified by the principles of harm and autonomy. They provide protection from undue harm from unsafe products, coercive employment practices or environmental degradation and so forth. They also are justified on the basis of the principle of autonomy because they set the “rules” by which all must play. They stabilize the environment and set minimal standards that all must meet in order to continue to operate.

This is not the highest principle by any means. Law may be unjust or unfair and may have been enacted without due process. There is a legitimate “loyal opposition” to given laws, keeping them while seeking to improve or change them. When laws are seen as unjust and as violations of other, more basic principles and values, civil disobedience may be the ethical action to take. Laws are meant to protect individual rights and regulate interaction between powerful institutions and organizations.

F. Confidentiality: Release information only to certain circles of people.

This principle is a role-related value or principle. It is particularly pertinent to organizational life, with trade secrets, industrial inventions, technological property and personnel matters. For personnel, this is mirrored in the “right to privacy.” The circles of people who have a “right to know” are limited depending upon their duties, responsibilities and need to have access to certain information in order to perform their duties properly. People have access to information that, if released more generally, can do great harm to individuals or to organizations.

Again, this is not an absolute value. When wrong-doing and law-breaking are happening, the “whistle-blower” has a duty to expose the evil that is being done, to release “confidential information.” However, there are corporate research plans, strategic tactics, personnel files, medical records and a host of other types of information that might be very harmful to someone's interests and goals if released to a third party. Ordinarily, these are confidential matters with a restricted circle of people who should have access.

The question of whether or not information is confidential depends on the potential effects of the release of that information (consequences, how severe and to whom), the origin of the information (who has rights to control it) and the intent of the release of the information (causing harm to the innocent is different than stopping malpractice and illegal actions).

Think About It

Answer Box #3

In thinking through this list of principles, how would you rate the organization for which you work in terms of observing these values?

3. Ethical Rights

The modern world has seen the development of the notion of “rights.” In fact, the list of rights sometimes seems interminable because almost anything can be claimed as a right. However, not all claims of rights meet the standard of a genuine right. A *right is a justified claim to something* (such as the claim to the right for a fair trial when accused of wrong doing). It means someone or some organization is obligated to perform some action or make some decision. Every “right” has a corresponding “obligation.”

Some claims are bogus, such as the claim of a student to get a passing grade (or even a high grade) on the basis that he paid his tuition and fees, or the claim of a student who says she worked hard and, therefore, should pass the course, regardless of actual performance in the class. A right is only a genuine right when justifiable reasons can be given for that right. Certainly, the student who surpassed the requirements of a course and scored in the top one percent on all work has a right to a fair grade (in this case an “A”). It would violate the student’s rights if the instructor failed the student because her parents did not pay a desired gratuity to the teacher or because the teacher was from a different ethnic group than the student.

In addition, we have to recognize that people can choose whether or not they exercise their rights. You may have a right to vote as a registered citizen of your country, but you may choose not to exercise that right. Nevertheless, people should not be coerced to give up their rights. Listed below are some widely recognized rights that are useful in making sense of what is involved in cases where ethical issues are at stake.

A. The Right to Know

The right to know is connected to the duty to inform. When a doctor examines me and discovers a medical condition, I have a right to know that condition, and she has the duty to inform me. People in certain roles and occupations have a right to know certain kinds of information. Sometimes those rights and duties are spelled out in laws, such as secrecy or confidentiality laws or the right to informed consent for patients undergoing some medical procedure. Most often they are informal expectations.

It is possible to violate the duty to inform without violating the principle of honesty. It may be that my doctor has been awake for more than twenty-four hours due to some medical crises and has been subject to a number of interruptions during our time together. In reviewing my record, she may simply be careless and forgetful and not inform me of all the results from tests. The information was not deliberately concealed or shaped so as to deceive me. She may be guilty of dereliction of duty or even incompetence, both of which violate the principle of fidelity. She was not fully professional in that interaction, as excusable as it may be due to exhaustion and distraction. She violated my right to know my current medical condition, but she did not do so deliberately.

B. The Right to Free Expression

This is the right to freely express your opinion without penalty. This does not include the right to say things that cause significant harm to another such as your employer. What you think or believe is your opinion, and you should not be penalized for holding it. Just because it displeases your employer is no basis for penalizing you or firing you.

This does not cover slander, where you say things that are false and damaging about another, nor is it the right to divulge sensitive and proprietary information such as technical corporate secrets that are part of the company’s basis for success. Also, you cannot violate the policies of the company if you have been hired with knowledge of those policies, such as rules of secrecy. This right does not empower speech that hinders the productivity of the work team, nor does one have a right to shout “fire” when there is no fire, in an enclosed area and cause a stampede that may injure people. The freedom of expression is limited by certain other values and rights.

This right requires wisdom when there are ambiguous boundaries. Some companies restrict the right to express one’s religious beliefs at work. When doing so does no harm to the company, it is a violation of the right of free expression. However, companies have rules about wearing religious symbols

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(rules about clothing or uniforms), about evangelizing or even carrying a Bible to work, so this is not an absolute right. In addition, the right of free expression requires discretion and wisdom to exercise it well.

C. *The Right to Due Process*

This is a right against the arbitrary use of power. In the instance of a dispute or decision that harms the interests and goals of someone, there is a right to an impartial third party mediating the dispute in order to rectify the harm. Appropriate procedures need to be in place to secure due process. Those who are rendering a decision should be individuals who have nothing to gain or lose by the outcome and can be impartial in assessing the issues.

This right fits well with the principles of autonomy and harm. Workers and others can be treated unjustly. They are not the property of others to be manipulated or treated unfairly with impunity. Due process gives people the chance to redress what they see as an unjust decision or action. They should be able to influence the conditions under which they live and work. The principle of equal consideration of interests suggests that those who hold power should seek the conditions for fairness they would want were they those with less power. Usually those who resist due process do so largely to advance their own interests at the cost of others.

D. *The Right to Safety*

People have the right to work and gather in places where reasonable steps have been taken to protect people in those places from bodily harm. School buildings in earthquake zones should meet strong building codes so they do not collapse. Workers in a factory should not have to handle hazardous materials without appropriate precautions. Police should be restricted in their use of deadly force so that peaceful demonstrations are not ended with a hail of bullets.

Part of this right includes the right to know the risks and dangers faced by participating in certain activities. Employees should be educated regarding the hazards in their work, trained in terms of how to deal with them and educated to know whether to consent in an informed way whether or not they choose to be in certain positions where the dangers may be extreme. An organization should have reasonable safety procedures in place for the conditions of their work and buildings.

All of this is a matter of degree, but the principle is clear. Nothing can be made “risk free,” but there are fair and prudent measures that meet principles of do no harm, autonomy and fidelity.

E. *The Right to Privacy*

This is the right to control information about yourself and the access to it. This is probably a more controversial and difficult right than the others because one is balancing an individual right against the right of the group to know. In extreme cases, people may lose this right. In the United States, predatory sexual offenders who have been convicted of sex crimes lose this right. Neighborhoods in which they live where there are vulnerable children also have the right to safety and knowledge. Therefore, the neighbors may be informed that a sexual offender is living in their neighborhood.

There are so many avenues of information about us available in a digital age. Every time we appear in public or must give information in order to access a website or make a purchase, we give away information about ourselves. Who has a right to it? Who has a right to know I am HIV/AIDS positive? Who has a right to know my telephone number or my age? What information is essentially mine?

To be sure, there is information that can cause embarrassment, loss of a job, loss of status or even bodily harm. People who exploit it violate my right to privacy. When I give confidential information to an employer, I have a right to expect that the Human Relations office will keep that confidential. Infringing on that right violates the fidelity principle, may damage my autonomy and do me harm.

However, some lines are fuzzy. An employer may have a right to know who is stealing from the supplies, but may not have the right to secretly search my car or put a camera in the bathroom to see if I am hiding goods under my clothes. Those would violate the right to privacy. There is dispute over whether my use of a company computer to send personal email gives my employer the right to read that email or the right to read anything kept on a company computer. These are disputed areas.

In summary, the notion of Equal Consideration of Interests (a modified “golden rule” principle), combined with widely shared values/principles and human rights, provides a minimal common ground for ethical advocacy. Even when we may not be of the same faith or culture, we may be able to agree to some common principles. Our Christian commitments to love and justice will see much in these secularized notions that connect with our own ethical sensibilities. Still, these secular principles are not all that we might wish them to be, but they are not nothing. In later units we will explore the larger circle of matters that make up a Christian ethic.

As leaders we often find ourselves in the marketplace, government or in civic society in pluralistic settings where different values and religious ideas are at the table. While we bring our Christian worldview with us and advocate for Christian solutions, we must recognize that policies, ethical codes and laws may only partially embody what our notions of love and justice seek. We need to support those codes and

policies that do advance an Equal Consideration of Interests. We may not be permitted, and it may not be a good strategy, to use explicitly Christian language in public advocacy of justice matters. Therefore, we need to discover common ground and common language to advocate the sorts of conduct we know God desires. At times, even this is futile, and we must finally say that we are followers of Christ and believe these ways are for the best good of the planet and all peoples because of our belief in God. We may conclude we cannot join hands and hearts when we cannot come to some minimally acceptable common standards of conduct.

An Example of RESOLVEDD in Practice

Now we want to turn to a case study and spell out the way in which this set of steps enables us to work through the issues involved in reaching a decision about the right thing to do.

A. Case: The Dilemma of Bimal

As a supervisor in a beverage bottling company (Duro-Pure), you (Bimal) work hard at motivating your subordinates. You are successful with many, but one of them, Kumar, a senior worker, is minimally competent and is unresponsive to your best efforts to motivate him to better performance.

All hourly employees at the firm are protected by a union contract with an appeals process and binding arbitration provisions. Kumar is a slow and ineffective worker, but he is swift and knowledgeable when it comes to asserting his rights under the work contract. It is difficult to fire an employee, even when their work is substandard.

Kumar is now in his fifties and will not likely retire for another decade. He supports a family with four children and a widowed mother. Jobs are difficult to find in the present economy, especially if you are older. He operates one of the bottle cap punch machines. In comparison with others in the same position, he produces an average of twice as many defective caps, and his output is normally only two thirds that of other punch operators. Neither conversations with him nor additional training has had any effect. In fact, it has resulted in quite the contrary, denial of any problems, resentment for being singled out, obstinacy and the insistence that his work is not below union standards.

Your supervisor (Chahna) knows and despises Kumar. His coworkers also dislike him. They see him as slacking off in the job. He is often the object of their jokes, but he has not had a negative effect on them, and no coworker complaints have been filed against him. Although his work is not a major problem for you, your supervisor sees him as “dead wood” (a useless, unproductive worker) and wants you to get rid of him.

Recently your boss suggested that you should take steps to make life at work unpleasant for Kumar so that he would resign of his own accord. She suggested that you move him often among the least desirable and dirtiest jobs. You might assign him alternately to night work and then back to day work every few weeks. Such assignments are within the union contract agreement. However, if you do this, it will be noticed and easily documented. What should you do?

B. Case Analysis

We will apply the RESOLVEDD method to this workplace case. It presents the supervisor, Bimal, with an ethical dilemma. Whatever Bimal does, he must choose some action to deal with this issue. If he chooses to do nothing, such inaction will have consequences. If he follows the steps suggested by his own boss, he will clearly cause harm to Kumar and treat him in an underhanded and dishonest manner. If he chooses against the interests of the company, consequences will follow. Bimal's boss may decide to make life unpleasant for him. In this analysis, we will use the principles articulated in this unit, though later on we will develop a more well-rounded Christian set of principles that might ground some of these principles and add some additional ones. We will also simplify the case by presenting only two alternative solutions even if you may be able to think up a third or even a fourth as well.

The steps in the analysis of this case are in the following order:

1. Review of the case
2. Ethical problem in the case
3. Solutions 1 and 2
4. Outcomes 1 (outcomes of solution 1)
5. Likely impact 1 (likely impact of solution 1)
6. Values 1 (values upheld and violated by solution 1)
7. Outcomes 2 (outcomes of solution 2)
8. Likely impact 2 (likely impact of solution 2)
9. Values 2 (values upheld and violated by solution 2)
10. Evaluation
11. Decision
12. Defense of decision

1. Review of the case

This case arises due to the pressure of Bimal's boss on Bimal to get rid of an employee he supervises because Kumar is a poor worker. It seems that though Kumar's production and performance are low, they are not so substandard that a case can be made to fire him. He is not doing anything wrong, and no complaints have been filed by coworkers. Management has decided they want Kumar out, and Bimal is expected to take steps to get him to resign.

Ordinarily it is not good practice for managers to make decisions for their subordinates. Chahna should not be deciding what Bimal should do about one of the workers he supervises. While she has only "suggested" a line of action, it is clear Bimal has to be responsive to his boss's wishes. He will not want to offend his boss by simply ignoring this explicit suggestion.

2. Ethical problem in the case

It is clear that the ethical problem is not Kumar. The problem is created by the suggestion of Bimal's boss. It suggests doing some things that are sneaky, mean and not entirely ethical. The challenge for Bimal is how to respond to his boss, and the interest of the company, to whom he should be loyal. However, her suggested line of action would unfairly violate the principles of doing no harm and treating others with dignity. The harm may be done to Kumar's family as well, if Bimal succeeds in getting him to resign.

Part of the dilemma is due to the fact that Chahna gave a *suggestion*, not an *order*. There is no clear-cut obligation to carry out what was suggested exactly, but does the principle of fidelity mean Bimal owes it to his employer to do all he can to raise the productivity of Kumar, within ethical and legal limits? How also does Bimal effectively communicate what he decides to do to his boss, especially if it only produces minimal improvements and no resignation? Whatever Bimal does, he will want a solution with which his boss will agree and see that the decision really is in the interests of Duro-Pure as a company.

The dilemma seems to be a question of whether to uphold the principle of do no harm or the principle of fidelity. A number of other values are involved as well, including Kumar's right to know and the principle of autonomy.

3. Solutions 1 and 2

Bimal can (1) follow the suggestions of his boss or (2) resist his boss's suggestion and handle Kumar in a different way. If Bimal chooses (2), there are a number of different lines of action he could take. He could continue to counsel Kumar; he could talk with the union representatives and see if they can bring peer pressure for improvement; he could send him for additional training; he could see whether there is another position in the firm that might better suit Kumar's abilities and motivation.

4. Outcomes 1 (outcomes of solution 1)

If Bimal follows his boss's suggestion and rotates Kumar among the least desirable jobs and puts him on an undesirable time schedule, Chahna might be pleased. However, Kumar is only lazy, not stupid. He might figure out what is going on and seek avenues to stop it. If he took his case to the union by filing a complaint on the basis that this change in his work assignment is harassment, he might win. On the other hand, he might just quit the job.

5. Likely impact 1 (likely impact of solution 1)

Rotating Kumar in this way is likely to upset him, even to the point of quitting or filing a complaint. This could create problems for Bimal if the other workers he supervises see this as mistreatment of one of their own and fear they might be next. It could turn into a nasty and demoralizing situation. The other workers might decide to stage a work slowdown and reduce efficiency at the plant. Management and labor conflict might break out. Then everyone would experience harm, Kumar, the workers and the company.

6. Values 1 (values upheld and violated by solution 1)

Following Chahna's suggestions would uphold the principle of fidelity toward one's boss and the company. It would be respecting the chain of command. It would take steps to address an acknowledged problem with an employee and increase efficiency, thus reducing the harm Kumar's poor performance does to the company.

It would violate the principle of autonomy toward Kumar. Unless Kumar knows the reasons behind the job and schedule rotation, he cannot confront the challenge he faces and make the most rational response to it. The shifting around may confuse and demoralize him. This also would hinder him from thinking about the real choices that face him. If Kumar quit, both Bimal and Chahna would be happy, but Kumar does have a right to know that he doesn't have to quit but simply to improve his performance if he wants a long term job at Duro-Pure. Not giving him the chance to know means he cannot confront management's allegations about his performance and removes the chance for him to have due process.

It would also violate the principle of honesty toward Kumar by Bimal's hiding his true motives. It also violates the principle of fidelity that Bimal owes to Kumar and his family. It would not be acting in Kumar's best interest or in a way that is faithful to him. The simple purpose of this line of action is to manipulate Kumar by making his work experience miserable so that he might resign and management would not have to meet the standards of due process or binding arbitration. This violates the principle of do no harm.

7. Outcomes 2 (outcomes of solution 2)

If Bimal ignores the suggestions of his boss, Chahna may view him as stubborn and inflexible. She may get someone else to do the "dirty" deed. However, if she does not pressure Bimal, he may find another solution to handling Kumar.

8. Likely impact 2 (likely impact of solution 2)

If Bimal ignores the suggestion, he might be given a poor job performance review by Chahna. She has indicated that she wants the overall performance of his team or unit improved and thinks getting rid of Kumar is one key element of that. However, if Bimal can accomplish that by another means, that might satisfy his boss. Kumar might not suffer as much under an alternative line of action. Nevertheless, Kumar might still be harmed and take it out on Bimal and the company. If the other workers in Bimal's unit see whatever is done as unfair and mean, they might take it out on Bimal.

9. Values 2 (values upheld and violated by solution 2)

Bimal's refusal to follow Chahna's suggestions could be seen as violating the fidelity principle by failing to respond appropriately to the demands and instructions of superiors. When he was hired, the implicit and often explicit understanding is that the holder of this position is obliged to follow the instructions of his or her superior. If every employee got to choose whether or not to follow orders, there would be chaos.

There is ambiguity here because it was a "suggestion" not an order. It is not completely clear whether Bimal is obligated to follow suggestions in the same way as he is to follow clear orders. Still, if Chahna holds Bimal responsible for the outcome of this suggestion, he could be harmed by losing her support and being given a bad job performance review, impacting Bimal's future career.

This solution has the potential of upholding the do not harm principle if Bimal can handle Kumar in a way that Kumar sees as being treated fairly and honestly. The principles of fidelity to Kumar, autonomy, due process, the right to know and honesty will need to be considered in any alternative solution. If Bimal is creative, he may uphold these other values and rights. In so doing, he should not be harmed by the reaction of Kumar's fellow workers or the union.

10. Evaluation

Solution 1 has a number of advantages. It might be best for Kumar if it succeeds in motivating him to improve his performance and attitude or to quit the company. However, knowing past experience with seeking performance improvements and considering the meanness and underhandedness of the approach, it does not seem likely that Kumar will be motivated to change. It also will mean Bimal will compromise some ethical principles that are dear to him in order to please Chahna and the company. Such treatment is not ethical and cannot be justified by the fact that Kumar underperforms and is resistant to change. Two wrongs do not make a right. Moreover, this solution has the potential to backfire. Management and labor conflict could result. At a minimum, the fellow subordinates that report to Bimal may see him as mean and unfair, change their cooperative and positive attitudes toward him and even begin a slowdown at work. It could create the very opposite of increased efficiency and reduced problems in Bimal's unit, thus having an adverse impact on his career. For many reasons this is the worst solution.

Solution 2 faces the problem of ignoring the boss's clear desires, even if they were only framed as suggestions. This jeopardizes Chahna's good opinion of Bimal and has the potential of a bad performance review. It is not a significant violation of the fidelity principle since it was only a suggestion, not an order. There is, however, little reason to be optimistic that any alternative solution will solve the performance problem of Kumar, so all the values/principles upheld by solution 2 may be nothing more than an illusion. This second solution would be ethically preferable, but if it doesn't lead to a real solution to the problem, what good is it in the end?

The main problem with solution 2 is the threat it holds to Bimal's career and relationship with his boss. Kumar's rights must be respected, but at the same time Bimal must deal fairly and faithfully with his boss.

11. Decision

So what did Bimal do? Bimal decided the first thing to do was to have a serious, in-depth conversation with Chahna. He would go in and explain as diplomatically and inoffensively as possible all the disadvantages of rotating Kumar in jobs and schedule. Things that would be stressed would include

the following: upper management would look unfavorably at that solution; ethically acceptable alternative measures were available and Bimal can outline them; a strategy has been designed to handle this difficult solution as best as possible. We also need to emphasize that the principle of do no harm pertains not only to the company and the potential harm that would come from solution 1, but to Kumar as well. His rights need to be respected, as difficult an individual as he might be.

Once Chahna realizes the potential harm that might come from management-labor conflict and the damage to worker-supervisor relationships if the company is seen as being mean and unfair, Bimal might just carry the argument. If so, Chahna may drop the suggestion altogether. It may be a situation with which the company will have to live and manage rather than create the potential for a major decline in morale and perhaps even generate conflict. At the same time, Bimal might make a case that an alternative handling of Kumar still might yield good results.

12. Defense of decision

The first problem with the decision is that Chahna might be entrenched in her opinion of Kumar and the importance of getting him out of company employment. She could insist that Bimal defer to her greater experience and authority. If this is the case, Bimal has no alternatives but to continue to seek to convince Chahna that this first solution is really a bad approach to the problem.

The second problem is what past experience with Kumar foretells. It is likely that no matter what Bimal does, Kumar will resist and persist in low performance. If this happens, then Bimal's boss will hold him responsible for not dealing with the problem, but this can be true with every situation in which we seek to change the performance and conduct of other people. We only have influence. They may not be rational and compliant or listen to suggestions for improvement. If this happens, Chahna might be open-minded enough to see all Bimal did to change Kumar's behavior. In any case, Bimal can be comfortable with the reality that he did not treat Kumar unfairly or unethically. Integrity is a greater loss than the loss of a good performance review. Kumar's unfair or irrational responses are not under Bimal's control. In the end, it is probably better to trust that Chahna will be reasonable and fair than to try to get Kumar to act reasonably and fairly toward his job or Duro-Pure.

C. Additional Observations

There are several additional things that can be said about this case (even any case) and its analysis.

1. Any description of an ethical problem may make no mention of some **information** that is relevant and important to the final decision. When you are dealing with a situation such as Bimal, Chahna and Kumar, you will likely have much more information of the context and nuances than we were given in this short case study. However, when you analyze a case such as Bimal's dilemma, you have to assume such information is not known and develop your analysis and decision *on the basis of what you know just from the case*.
2. It is important to know that all decisions (even technical ones) are made in the face of **uncertainty** and some levels of ambiguity. There are always important facts and factors that remain beyond the knowledge of the decision maker. All decisions have an element of risk and speculation in them. We are not God, and we are not fully knowledgeable or wise. Nevertheless, we make decisions on what we think are likely facts and consequences with the information and facts as we know them. Bimal may think Kumar's change in performance is highly unlikely. His decision is rooted in that conviction, but he may be wrong. Decision making in ethics requires you to make decisions and respond thoughtfully on different options without all the facts in hand.
3. Doing a full RESOLVEDD analysis takes **time**. As a leader you may often find yourself in a situation where you cannot take the time to think things all the way through. You must decide now or in a very short period of time. The value of working the RESOLVEDD method is that, with practice, you learn to see alternative solutions and to quickly diagnose what values and principles are involved. This is part of becoming "ethically fit." You develop the habits and the wisdom to know what to do in situations because you have seen similar ones in the past and know what works and honors all the most important values and principles while fostering good human relationships. The pressures of time mean you will make some decisions poorly and even wrongly. But with practice and learning from your mistakes, over time, this will become "second nature" to you. You will begin to have better intuition as to what is going on with a situation and the people in it. You will have better internal balance in terms of what you need to do in order to do what is right and the good and perfect will of God here and now. That is in part what this course seeks to foster in you, the courage and confidence to trust the Spirit as you search Scriptures and live fully in the jobs and roles you have. God will grow you into a leader who displays wisdom and integrity.

Models: Esther

One of the fascinating aspects of the Bible is that it is free to tell stories that do not even mention God. Esther and Song of Solomon are two such books. This is not to say that God is not active and at work in the matters that these books present. The book of Esther is one of the great accounts of God's providential ordering of history.

The exile spread Jews throughout the Persian Empire, positioning them for several hundred years in areas where the Gospel of Jesus Christ would one day come. There the Gospel would encounter hundreds of Jewish synagogues and find receptive Jews who would be the first fruits of the spread of the Gospel to all nations. They knew the local languages and cultures, having been integrated into their local context for generations.

All of that future preparation for the Gospel was threatened by the arrogant pride of Haman, the Agagite. His deeply rooted anger at Mordecai led him to plot the extermination of an entire people (an early attempt at genocide). He turned his wounded pride at not being bowed to by Mordecai into a devilish plot to kill all the "seed" of Israel in one blow. The only thing standing between that certain outcome was Mordecai's adopted daughter, Esther.

A Model of Ethical Living: Esther—courage to do what is right (Esther 4)

Bible reading: Read the above text before continuing with reading this module.

When we talk about being a leader whose virtues and skills enable the right things to get done (and who do the right thing), we need to highlight one characteristic that enables all the others. Courage⁷ is essential, for good conduct counts most when it is most costly. It is easy to be a regular worshipper of God, unless doing so will land you in the fiery furnace. (Daniel 3) Only four in that large crowd did not bow down. It is easy to give true testimony when the powers that be are ready to hear it. It is another thing to testify to the truth when all the important people hurl insults at you, call you a liar and throw you out. (John 9)

Courage is part of integrity, the steadfastness to do what you know is right even when it is personally costly. It is not incompatible with fear. One can be fearful, as Esther might have been, but courage enables the action, despite the anxiety. It is strength of will, bravery and inner fortitude to persevere and withstand danger, threat or difficulty.

Esther is part of the ethical *familial paradigm* of the Old Testament. She identifies her own individual fate with that of her people. While preserving and nurturing life (biological) is a central value of the familial paradigm, it is not primarily thought of in individualistic terms. Life for the individual is life in the community. Individuals are often asked to forgo their own individual interests but rarely to forgo their own life to save the larger family or community though we see this willingness in others besides Esther.⁸ However, Esther risks her very life for the sake of the lives of the larger Jewish community.

- Her ethical **challenge**: to risk her life to preserve the lives of many.
- Her ethical **action**: to enter the presence of the king without permission when doing so could mean death.
- Her **temptation**: to play it safe and be passive in the face of powerful evil.
- The **cost** of her doing what was right: risking her life and position with the absolute political power of her day.
- The **reward** of her doing what was right: the preservation of Israel among the nations, paving the way for the Messiah.

⁷ Roman Catholicism calls it "fortitude" and considers it to be one of the four cardinal [pivotal] virtues (alongside justice, temperance and prudence). Both Catholicism and Anglicanism also see courage as a gift of the Spirit.

⁸ Tamar (Genesis 38) and Daniel (3:16-18; 6:10). It is the Suffering Servant of the Lord (Isaiah 53) who gives his life so that the people of God may live.

Think About It

Answer Box # 4

1. Can you describe a situation where you knew the stakes were very high and the opposition powerful and you were tempted to play it safe and be passive in the face of clear evil?
2. Would you like to live differently in the future? If so, how?

Summary

Part of the task of becoming mature in our ethical life is knowing how to analyze a situation we face (or we failed in) so as to make explicit all the factors that influence making good decisions and taking appropriate action. Discernment, intuition and practical wisdom (prudence) can be sharpened and deepened by such explicit analysis. We reviewed a common frame for ethical thinking known as the Equal Consideration of Interest. It is based on the Golden Rule and has many positive features from a Christian point of view. However, its use of “neutral” language allows us to join hands with others who are not Christ-followers and agree upon common ethical principles that will enable us to lead with justice and fairness for all in our circle of influence. We reviewed the case of Bimal as an example of a simple analysis in order to illustrate the use of ECI and its accompanying list of principles and rights.

Unit 5 Final Assignment

Final Assignment

1. Write on one to two pages your thoughts about how the lives of people in your church or organization might change if they took very seriously the practical implications of the Equal Consideration of Interests along with the principles and rights articulated. These may be minimal secular standards, but it sometimes is surprising that our own “Christian” organizations are not even meeting these standards of conduct.
2. In looking at the various formulations of the golden rule (Appendix B), do you see any of them that are applicable and used in your context? Are there other equivalents in the ethical environment of your larger culture that parallel or are compatible with the golden rule as a basic principle for living ethical lives? What might they be, and how do Christians relate to them?
3. Please confirm that you have discussed the results of your interactive work in Unit 5 (“Think About It” boxes) with a group of two other people.
4. For this unit the reading in Stott was 71-94 “Our Plural World: Is Christian Witness Influential?” One of the issues that Christian leaders face is how to advocate positions that fit well with a Christian worldview in those pluralistic arenas. What role can “neutral” language such as that articulated in ECI and the principles and values developed in this unit play in providing common ground to develop an ethic Christians and non-Christians might find mutually agreeable?

When your work is complete (three to five pages total), send a copy to your facilitator via email as an attachment. Please send it by the date indicated in the Module Calendar.

Appendix A: RESOLVEDD Checklist⁹

1. **Review**
 - What are the particularly important and relevant details of the case?
 - How did the situation come about?
 - Is something wrong? What? Why?
 - Is anyone at fault? Who? Why?
 - Is there likely to be a disagreement over the case from people related differently to it? Why?
 - What are the different perspectives people may have on the case?
 - What information do you have that is missing and that you must decide without having?
2. Identify **E**thical problems
 - What options do *you* have in this situation?
 - Why is it difficult to make a decision in the case?
 - Initially, what do you think is the main ethical conflict in the case?
 - What main points will you need to consider in making the decision?
3. Identify **S**olutions
 - Group the options into a small, manageable number of main solutions. Remember that you may end up deciding to do something that is not exactly like any of the solutions with which you began.
4. Identify **O**utcomes
 - What are the significant possible consequences of each main solution?
5. Identify **L**ikely impact
 - In what ways is each main solution (that you might implement) likely to affect people's lives by helping or hurting them?
6. Identify **V**alues
 - What important ethical principles (especially those drawn from Scripture or the imperatives for love and justice) are upheld by each main solution? How?
 - What important ethical principles are violated by each main solution? How?
 - Have you explained how each main ethical principle or value is violated or upheld by each main solution?
7. **E**valuate each main solution
 - Are some consequences of some possible solutions more important than others? Why?
 - Does one solution uphold or violate certain values or principles in more or less important ways than another? Why?
 - Why is one possible solution better or worse than another?
 - If all main solutions are unsatisfactory, have you searched for other possibilities? Have you considered that new unthought-of possibilities may be hidden in your main solutions and that you might find a variation of one that is satisfactory?
8. **D**ecide which solution is the best
 - Exactly how will you carry out your decision? Explain the details.
 - Just why is this decision the best, all things considered? Explain.
9. **D**efend the decision
 - What are the main weaknesses of your decision? Why might someone object to your decision?
 - If these weaknesses have not been stated and addressed earlier, do so here.
 - What are the best answers to these weaknesses? Why do you still think your decision is the best? Explain.

⁹ Pfeiffer and Forsberg, op.cit, pp. 41-42.

Appendix B: The Golden Rule in Various Formulations

These statements constitute what is known as the “ethic of reciprocity.” It asks that we put ourselves in the other person’s position and ask what we should want for our best interest—and that then serves as a guideline for ethical decisions and actions. What we would not wish be done to us we should not impose on the other. What we would want for our best self is what we should give to others. The principles and values you want to govern decisions and actions toward yourself are the very ones you should use in making decisions and actions toward others.

Greek Philosophers:

- *What you wish your neighbors to be to you, such be also to them.* – Sextus the Pythagorean (406 B.C.)
- *Avoid doing what you would blame others for doing.* – Thales (Diogenes Laërtius, *The Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, I, 36)

Jesus:

- *So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.* – Matthew 7:12
- *Do to others as you would have them do to you.* – Luke 6:31

Judaism:

- *That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. That is the whole Torah; the rest is the explanation; go and learn.* – Rabbi Hillel, Talmud, Shabbat 31a, the "Great Principle."

Hinduism:

- *One should never do that to another which one regards as injurious to one’s own self. This, in brief, is the rule of dharma. Other behavior is due to selfish desires.* – Brihaspati, Mahabharata (Anusasana Parva, Section CXIII, Verse 8)

Islam:

- *Seek for mankind that of which you are desirous for yourself, that you may be a believer; treat well as a neighbor the one who lives near you, that you may be a Muslim [one who submits to God] – Sukhanan-i-Muhammad (Teheran, 1938) [English Title: Conversations of Muhammad]*

Confucianism:

- *Never impose on others what you would not choose for yourself.* – Confucius, Analects XV.24 (tr. David Hinton)
- The same idea is also presented in V.12 and VI.30 of the Analects.

Ethics for Living and Leading
Unit 6
Where Do We Find
Dependable Ethical Guidance?



Development Associates International

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Unit 6 - Where Do We Find Dependable Ethical Guidance? (By listening to Jesus and Moses in Scripture)

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Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- Identify the authoritative foundations of ethical norms used by Jesus and the Apostle Paul;
- Define the different levels at which commands come and understand the first four of the Ten Commandments;
- Review the nature of our ethical responsibilities toward God;
- Analyze the ethical decisions of a biblical character.

Read and Respond

Readings are included at the end of most units. These texts provide biblical and cultural framework for an adequate understanding of Christian ethics. Please reflect and respond as indicated in assignments found within the texts.

Supplementary text: John R. W. Stott, Issues Facing Christians Today, 4th Edition (Zondervan, 2006). For Unit 6, please read pp. 97-134 War and Peace.

Lecture Notes & Workbook

Overview

A full course on business ethics would be useful, but that is not what we are trying to present here. Rather, in this course we are trying to establish a foundation for understanding and practicing a distinctively Christian ethic, both in our personal lives and in our responsibilities as organizational and church leaders. This means that the ethical criteria we need for decisions and actions that truly please God are not found primarily in the philosophy of any particular group of people, including organizational management specialists. While management associations may promote good business ethics that deserve the respect of all people, they do not represent the full range of ethical considerations for committed Christians.

As followers of Jesus, we would do well to look first for ethical guidance in the same place that Jesus found it, in the written word of God. What Jesus had to say about ethics is the most important word we can hear. Also, we would like to see if the Apostle Paul used the same sources of ethical guidance as Jesus. Finally, we would like to examine those sources for ourselves.

Our evaluation of those things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely and admirable—things that are excellent and praiseworthy—in our own culture and in other sources of ethics will be governed by our Christian identity and principles (see Philippians 4:8-9). This is not an either/or matter. Clarity on God's standards and will for life enables us to sort and affirm those things that are true, right and excellent in our own organization and culture. We face many complex issues in our time that are not directly addressed in Scripture. However, in Scripture we find the center of our ethics and the firm foundation for our decisions and conduct in modern times.

The early Christians asked not only what they ought to do but why. Specific moral questions led to reasons why one line of conduct was appropriate for followers of Christ rather than others. All of it sought to discern and describe the life that is worthy of the Gospel of Christ. In this unit we are asking that very same set of questions. Where can we find reliable guidance for living and leading ethically? The first place we start is with Jesus Christ himself. If Christian ethics is Christ-centered, it can do no better than begin with Christ, but we will not stop there. We also find ethical guidance the same place Jesus found it, in the Old Testament.

I. Jesus and Ethical Norms (Matthew 5-7)

When Jesus carried out his public work he taught many things about God, God's Kingdom and God's will for human life. His preaching and teaching was summarized in the following phrase: "The Kingdom of God has drawn near." (Mark 1:15) Jesus taught that God was the sovereign King of the Universe and that he was now acting decisively to bring about the salvation of all Creation.

The prophets had looked for a final and decisive act of God, something analogous to God's mighty acts in the past—a new Exodus, a new entry into the land, a new David, a new Jerusalem, a new covenant. Jesus announced that this "new age" was at hand where God's reign over the nations and the whole of Creation would bring an end to the rule of sin and death. His Kingdom was near. It was a Kingdom we cannot hasten or delay. We can enter it by repentance. It is a state of affairs, not a state of mind. That very Kingdom is already present in a hidden and humble way in the ministry of Jesus. It is witnessed to by his miracles and by his resurrection.

Because of this mighty act of God of inaugurating the Kingdom, obedience to God's will and laws are motivated here and now. Hope is generated for the future climax. The great reversal of sin and injustice is coming. The first shall be last. The poor and outcastes, the downtrodden and oppressed will be lifted up and blessed. Jesus' ethic is an ethic or response to this mighty act of God's inauguration of the Kingdom of God. We are to welcome that Kingdom, to enter it and to live by its norms and goals.

Repentance is a joyful turning away from our past life, renouncing old securities and conventional values to welcome God's rule in our life. It brings an end to our sinful love of self and self-assertiveness. We are told to be last of all, to surrender our rights and privileges of social status in a life of humble service. We are not to be anxious for our material success but to give generously and gladly to assist the needy and poor. We are to welcome children and care for them. We are not to be critical and judgmental of others. Forgiveness and peacemaking are part of the way of this Kingdom.

This coming of the Kingdom demands the response of the whole person. Much of what Jesus said sounded new, and people were amazed at the authority with which he taught. (Matthew 7:28-29) However, naturally his listeners wanted to know whether the new things he was saying destroyed the value of what Moses and the prophets taught in the Old Testament.

The law that God gave to Moses constituted Israel's detailed guide for living in a way that pleased God. In Jesus' day, was the law of Moses (that Moses had received almost 1500 years earlier) still valid and still in need of being obeyed? The rabbis of his day affirmed that law in the following two forms:

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1. The *Halakah* (the legal mode) were specific, *authoritative prescriptions and prohibitions* that spelled out the implications of the Mosaic law for contemporary life when new, concrete questions of conduct came up. They were specific rules and directives.
2. The *Haggadah* (the edifying mode) were *examples and stories* that displayed the identity and character required to live in a pleasing way before God.

Jesus, surprisingly, criticized the rabbis for the ways in which they misused the law in their oral *Halakah* and *Haggadah*. They majored on minors and neglected the weightier things of the law, thus undermining the very law they professed to love and obey. We see this very clearly in the Sermon on the Mount, but Jesus did not disagree with them about the validity and importance of the Mosaic law.

One day Jesus sat down on a mountainside with his disciples and said to them, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." (Matthew 5:17) This text makes clear the faithfulness of Jesus to the law. Jesus continues, "I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished." (Matthew 5:18) In other words, for his followers the law was indispensable, even its small details.

In the words that follow (Matthew 5:19), Jesus spoke of the Kingdom of heaven but did not instruct his disciples to keep the law in order to enter it. Rather he said, "Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called the least in the Kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the Kingdom of heaven." So, the law given to Moses was very important for living as a follower of Jesus, but keeping it was not the way to enter the Kingdom. Entering the Kingdom came through faith in Jesus, not in keeping the law.

In the rest of this chapter Jesus interprets various commands of the Old Testament law. Six times Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago... But I tell you..." In each case Jesus begins with a command such as "Do not murder." (Matthew 5:21) He then points to the attitude of heart that that represents the spirit behind the commandment that God desires. In this case, to observe this command includes not just refusing to murder someone but also refusing to harbor anger in our hearts toward another. (Matthew 5:22)

It is clear that the law is not just a list of duties or a formal code to follow. Its meaning goes deeper. Through the law, God called and continues to call God's followers out of selfishness and indifference to an attitude of love toward God and toward others. The law gives specific ways in which we are (or are not) to treat God and people, and Jesus explains the loving attitudes of heart that these commandments are meant to express.

God is the perfect model of this love that does not choose who will benefit from God's goodness. Jesus said, "Be perfect, therefore, just as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matthew 5:47) How does the Father show his goodness? "He [your Father] causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." (Matthew 5:45) The law reflects the character of the Father and his love for all people. It is a guide for us on how to express love concretely toward those God loves and toward God. The specific commands of the law enable us to see basic ways to express love. When it is love that is truly directing our behavior, then the spirit of the law that God intended is being carried out, not just a formal duty. Jesus said, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:27-39)

We discover in the Sermon on the Mount and other places that **Jesus relied on Scripture as the fundamental foundation and authority for shaping the ethic he taught us.** While we have underlined the law as an important resource, it is clear from the rest of the Gospels that the Writings (Psalms in particular), the Prophets (Isaiah in particular) and even what we call the Historical Books (the stories of Israel) served as places where Jesus returned when seeking criteria for discerning the right thing to do in given situations and relationships. God's written word was a fountain of wisdom, insight and guidance for Jesus as he taught us the ways of God.

Think About It

Answer Box # 1

1. Why is it important to obey the law?
2. What did Jesus say that upheld the law but also gave it a deeper meaning?
3. What is lost if people consider the law to be just a set of duties or a formal code?
4. What does the love of God and neighbor have to do with God's character? What does it have to do with the law?

Note: Are you marking new insights (!) as well as questionable ideas (?) that you can go back to later for further analysis?

II. The Apostle Paul's Foundation of Ethical Authority (Romans 13:8-14)

The question of Christian moral obligations was fundamental to the writings of Paul. Many of his letters include significant sections about behaviors and attitudes that are to be set aside as incompatible with our identity of people who are in Christ. Because we are new creations in Christ, our past life no longer has a continuing importance. A new life has come.

We have moved from the "kingdom of darkness" and into the "kingdom of light." We now are to live life with a new motivation and intention, a new outward conduct and a new set of goals for ourselves and others. Paul lists "vices" (see Appendix A of Unit 3, pp. 56-57) to be ended and "virtues" or gifts and graces of the Spirit to be nurtured and brought to maturity. We are to put off the old person we once were with its habits and passions and put on the new person who is being transformed by the Spirit into the likeness of Christ. To respond to the Gospel is to shift our lives so that we are different inwardly and outwardly because the power of the Spirit and the Kingdom now governs us.

Paul's letters were written to address concrete problems of specific communities of the first century, and yet they were written with apostolic authority. In these letters he uses the language of request and admonition rather than command. He stresses the freedom and responsibility the Christians have in Christ. His ethical guidance and teaching are always within the context of his proclamation of the Gospel and the specific situation encountered by the community to whom he is writing.

It is clear that he always begins with what God is doing, just as Jesus did. God in Jesus Christ is bringing about a new age, a new Creation within this old age and old Creation. The power of God is present, bringing healing and salvation to those who respond in faith. God's work is the first reality that must be highlighted. We are justified by faith through the work of Jesus Christ in his death for us. This is the **indicative**—what God does *for us*.

Only then does Paul develop the **imperatives**—what God *requires from us*. Because we have been renewed and regenerated with new life, we are now free and responsible to live the new life of the coming new age. We no longer evaluate things simply from an earthly or fleshly perspective. All things are valued in light of the cross and resurrection of Christ. Paul considers the life and work of Christ definitive for the meaning and content of the character and conduct of the Christian.

This is not to say that he set aside the Old Testament. As a follower of this very Jesus who valued and depended upon the Old Testament Scriptures, we discover that Paul also had the same high opinion of such Scriptures. His writings are filled with direct and indirect dependency upon the Old Testament, but all of it was filtered through the perspective of the reality of Jesus as God's definitive revelation and Messiah.

The law of Moses and its place in the Christian life was very important for the Apostle Paul. In Romans 7, Paul declared that the law is "holy, righteous and good" (Romans 7:12) and that through the law we come to understand what sin really is (7:7). At the same time, the law has no power in itself to bring us forgiveness and salvation. (Romans 8:3); only the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ could accomplish that. Is there no other role for the law than to show us our sinfulness and point us to Christ?

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Paul's answer is that, for the Christian, the law can now find its true calling *as a pointer* to the kind of life that God wants to be manifested in us. Paul teaches in Romans 8:4 that the righteous requirements and intentions of the law are to be fully met in us as we live according to the Spirit rather than according to our old sinful natures. The Spirit writes the intent and content of the law on our hearts.

The most fundamental component of the law is love of one's fellow human being. (Romans 13:8) The Ten Commandments mark the path of love for us. (Romans 13:9-10) Observing these commandments helps us accomplish all of the law that is summarized in the one duty to love our neighbor and to do him or her no harm.

This law that expresses what God has always required was perfectly and fully accomplished by Christ. If we are, as Paul says, "in Christ," we too may begin living a new life as true children of God, reconciled to God and fulfilling our responsibilities to one another. Paul goes on to show that part of the motivation for living in this way is the hope we have of Christ's return and our ultimate salvation. (Romans 13:11) John spoke of the same hope that stimulates us to live pure, righteous lives in the light of the coming of Jesus Christ. (1 John 3:2-3) The law is not our means of salvation, but it is an essential guide for us in knowing how God wants us to live as members of God's family.

Think About It

Answer Box # 2

1. Have you met Christians who believe that the Ten Commandments were given just for Israel and that Christians have no obligation to obey them? What would you say to them?
2. What benefits are there for Christians who seek to take the Ten Commandments seriously as guides for their lives?
3. What are the dangers of ignoring the Ten Commandments?

For Paul, the foundation of his ethical instruction and guidance was rooted in Scripture as it was for Jesus. All of Scripture, Paul says, "is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that all God's people may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

We turn to Scripture to find the foundation and grounding notions of what is good, right and true. While we will spend more time on the rules-based element of the Old Testament (the imperatives of the Ten Commandments in particular), we are not suggesting this is the only resource for ethical guidance in Scripture. We find significant guidance from the Wisdom literature and the Prophets as well. Even more significantly, we are shaped in our moral imaginations by the narratives of the Old and New Testaments as we read the stories of real people struggling to live in difficult times and relationships. The "Models" sections of our units remind us of the importance of narrative as a source of guidance.

Setting our Moral Compass

Jesus and Paul set their moral compass according to the ethical heart of God's revelation in the Old Testament Law and Prophets. We have already noted the way in which Jesus summarized it.

'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets. (Matthew 22:37-40)

The Ten Commandments that Moses received from God on Mt. Sinai spell out the contents of the two Great Commandments that Jesus gave us. It is true that these commandments don't treat every moral issue we encounter today, but they offer necessary light to us as we seek to be faithful to God regarding the moral challenges that surround us. They instruct us in God's will and are the basis on which we can do the ethical thinking and acting that is needed in our country, our society, our organizations, our churches and our individual lives today.

In light of the importance of the Decalogue to Jesus, to Paul and to Christians through this present day, we want to take a closer look at these commandments. Our hope and prayer is that they will better enable us to discern the moral will of God for us as we deal with ethical challenges in our lives and ministries as leaders. In considering the sources of Christian ethics, we begin with the Old Testament.

Think About It

Answer Box # 3

1. Why do you think Jesus put so much emphasis on the attitudes of people's hearts and not just on their visible actions?
2. How might moral problems in your church and community be more effectively addressed if more attention were given to the motives and intentions of people's hearts?

III. Understanding the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17)¹

When people think of Christian ethics, they most frequently think of the Ten Commandments, also known as the Decalogue. (Exodus 20:1-17; Deuteronomy 5:6-21) Rules-based ethics is a fundamental element of Christian ethics, and the "Ten Words"² (the literal Hebrew) provide a marvelous framework of guidance for life as God designed it. The importance of this summary of the Torah (the law) can be seen in the following:

- They were written by the finger of God on stone tablets.
- They were spoken by the voice of God within people's hearing.
- They were kept in the Ark of the Covenant in the holy of holies.

These are words of guidance and instruction concerning the principles of love, freedom and justice for a worldwide people who are living in covenant faith with the living God. These are "policy statements" or "core values" which shape the outlook, worldview and conduct of those who have a living relationship with God. Each one offers a counsel for freedom (releasing us from the slavery of sin) as well as a principle of justice (what is right and fair) and love.

Jesus and the Apostles reaffirm nine of the ten words in their ethical instruction (the only one not reiterated as an imperative for Christians to keep is the Sabbath instruction). Jesus also summed up all the moral instruction given by God. In response to a question put to him concerning the moral duties of his people, Jesus replied with the following two sentences that summarize Christian ethics:

'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets. (Matthew 22:37-40)

These two commandments summarize the content of the Ten Commandments that God gave to Moses and Israel at Mt. Sinai. Reading the Decalogue gives an understanding of what Jesus meant in the two-commandment summary that we find in Matthew's Gospel. Many Christian writers have considered the command to love God with all our heart as a summary of the content of the first four commandments. Loving our neighbor as ourselves then sums up the content of the last six commandments. Others see all ten as having implications for how we love God and how we practice neighbor love.³

¹ In much of the following exposition of the Ten Commandments, we acknowledge a heavy debt to the excellent work of Dr. David W. Gill's book, *Doing Right: Practicing Ethical Principles* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004). What we develop in brief is discussed and developed fully in this work.

² "The Decalogue is a declarative text rather than a legislative proclamation. Let me underscore this: in Hebrew, the commandments are not formulated in the imperative but in the imperfect, which reveals their educative role. Human nature is not changed by the proclamation of an order by itself. It is necessary to educate man in the spirit of this ethical revelation." André Chouraqui, *Les Dix Commandements*, p. 153, quoted in David Gill, *Doing Right*, op. cit., p. 66.

³ For example, the first command to hold to God alone is a command about exclusivity in relationship. There is to be nobody who is preeminent in our lives but our Creator God, but this relational "sacredness" is also true of a number of other human relationships. Paul Stevens in *Married for Good* (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 1986), p. 86 takes the first three commandments structuring how we relate to God and relates them also to the

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Jesus, Paul and other New Testament writers referred to these Ten Words in a way that showed them to be authoritative for followers of Jesus. Christians through the centuries have also considered them to be authoritative teachings for all Christians everywhere. The dispensationalists (who have influenced other evangelical movements) have considered these commands not applicable to Christians, but this has not been the majority viewpoint. The majority of evangelicals see them as valued and essential elements of Christian ethics. Treasuring and observing them is not legalistic, as Jan Milič Lochman says:

To interpret the Ten Commandments legalistically and moralistically is to misunderstand them not just from the standpoint of the New Testament but also from that of the original context of the Decalogue itself.⁴

In this Lochman agrees with the classic Catholic and the Protestant Reformers. The Ten Commandments are edifying and instructive for us in the life in the Spirit. The new covenant fills the meaning of the old covenant's requirements and writes those requirements on our heart. Martin Luther offers these words: "This much is certain: anyone who knows the Ten Commandments perfectly knows the entire Scriptures. In all affairs and circumstances he can counsel, help, comfort, judge, and make decisions in both spiritual and temporal matters."⁵

John Wesley wrote of commands:

...that there is no contrariety at all between the law and the Gospel;...that there is no need for the law to pass away, in order to the establishing of the Gospel. Indeed, neither of them supersedes the other, but they agree perfectly well together. Yea, the very same words, considered in different respects are parts both of the law and of the Gospel: if they are considered as commandments, they are parts of the law; if as promises, of the Gospel....Every command in holy writ is only a covered promise.....God hath engaged to give whatsoever He commands.⁶

When we see the Ten Commandments as an important set of ethical guidance for human life, we are following a long tradition in Christian churches. We also acknowledge that what we have in these ten words are principles, not specifics. They are summaries that point not only to boundaries (the negative "you shall not") but to permissions (implied "you shall do the opposite"). As one writer on Old Testament ethics suggests:

The Decalogue appears not so much as a legal code itself as the foundational principles of the covenant on which subsequent legal codes may be based...The Decalogue seems more intended to lay out broad principles and general moral presumptions which require further legal application and refinement in particular contexts.⁷

Think About It

Answer Box # 4

What has been the attitude of your church toward the Ten Commandments? Are they taught and preached as ethical instruction for Christians in your context? What role do they play in the ethics of your church?

marriage relationship: "You shall give exclusive loyalty to your spouse." "You shall not make false images of your spouse." "You shall honor your spouse's name in public and private." The uniqueness and exclusivity with which God treats us as his children is the way we are to treat God and the way we are to treat our spouses as well. While we do not worship our spouse (the difference from our relationship with God), we need to live with them in love and justice by holding our relationship to be one of uniqueness and exclusivity.

⁴ Jan Milič Lochman, *Signposts to Freedom: The Ten Commandments and Christian Ethics* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982), p. 17

⁵ Martin Luther, *The Large Catechism*, trans. Robert H. Fischer (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 54.

⁶ John Wesley, *John Wesley's Forty-Four Sermons* (London: Epworth, 1952), pp. 255-56.

⁷ Bruce Birch, *Let Justice Roll Down: The Old Testament, Ethics and Christian Life* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), p. 168.

A. The Ten Commandments

First, we need to realize that some people ask whether these commandments are important for Christians now that God has offered us a new covenant in Christ. We can be sure that attempting to keep the Ten Commandments cannot repair people's broken relationship with God. The new covenant in Christ is not based upon our ability to perfectly obey the commandments. Rather, it depends on the fact that Christ perfectly obeyed these laws for us, laws that he said he came to fulfill, not to destroy. (Matthew 5:17) Entering into the new covenant depends on what Jesus did for us. He accomplished the justice that the law required. It is this justice of Christ that we receive by an act of God's grace when we put our faith completely in him. We are reconciled to God by grace, not through any merit of our own. (Ephesians 2:8-9) This good news enables us to be forgiven, to be adopted into God's family, to receive the gift of God's Spirit and to be placed "in Christ."

1. The Role of the Ten Commandments

How the Ten Commandments help us please God.

Even though our forgiveness and reconciliation with God do not depend on our keeping God's laws, once we have been brought back into fellowship with God, who loves us, created us and redeemed us, it is only natural that we should want to please God. How shall we do this? How then shall we live this new life in Christ that we have entered by faith through God's grace? We do it through continued faith in Christ, through the work of God's Spirit in our lives and through obedience to God's commands.

The Ten Commandments enable us to understand how God wanted Israel to live in this world. Jesus and Paul repeat their relevance for Christians within the new covenant. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) is an exposition of how God's people in the first century needed to live. It was in complete harmony with the Ten Commandments although it often went beyond them to show their spiritual depth and moral implications.

There are additional moral issues that Christians must address today that are not addressed directly by the Ten Commandments or by the Sermon on the Mount, but these biblical expressions of God's character and will for God's people, in both the Old and New Testaments, offer light to us as we seek to be faithful to God regarding the moral challenges of our unique contexts. Therefore, having a firm grasp on the moral laws that God gave to Moses is an indispensable foundation of Christian morality that pleases God. They are the basis for the further development of Christian ethical thinking and action that is needed around the world in our generation.

These commandments shape our expressions of love and justice.

By keeping these commandments a person is exhibiting the image of God, for they reflect God's character. Love for God, which flows out in love to neighbor, is the heart of God's moral will for God's people. These commandments begin to make specific how ethical thought and action look in daily life. In keeping God's commandments out of gratitude and love for God, we begin to fulfill God's moral purpose for us, and we find meaning in our lives. We discover some of the specific ways we can show justice to our neighbor.

These commandments offer insight into the state of our hearts

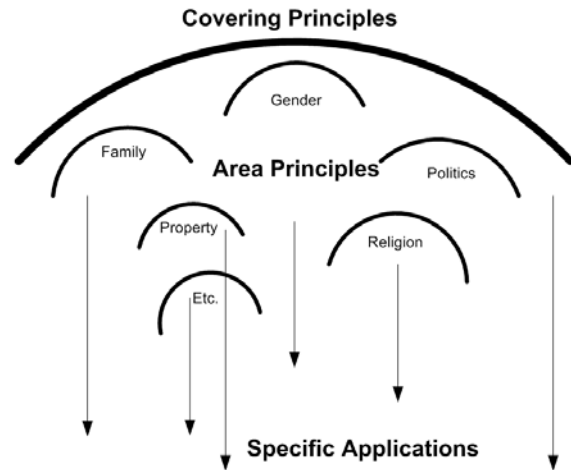
It is impossible to see the love that someone may have in his or her heart for God, but cultivation of the justice and integrity embodied in the last six commandments (loving our neighbor) offers evidence of the devotion of heart to which the first four commandments point (loving God). According to the Apostle Paul, "He who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law," including commandments one through four. (Romans 13:8) Paul repeats this truth in Galatians 5:14: "For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" This second great commandment is the means by which we testify to the reality of the first and most important commandment. In other words, it is one way of demonstrating that we are loving God with our whole being.

In the following presentation of the Ten Commandments we will occasionally add clarifying comments from the Anglican, Lutheran, Calvinist-Reformed and Baptist church traditions. We will also offer some additional comments on the force of each of the ten words in the light of a long tradition in the Christian church that sees them as important ethical guidance for practical matters of life.

2. Commandments come at several "levels"

We start our consideration of the Ten Commandments by noting that ethical rules come in three different levels:

- i. **Covering Principles:** Some rules are virtually universal and broad: “Love one another” (1 John 1:23) or “Act justly” (Micah 6:8). These are “covering” principles—rules or norms that “cover” all cases of life and relationships. Our very character is to be centered in love and justice. Every part of our conduct is to follow the principles of love and justice. Our motives and intentions should be energized by love and a hunger for justice and righteousness. We should display in our habits the virtues of love and justice. They cover all parts of life and action.



Later we will look more closely at this level of rules or principles. Jesus and others make clear that these covering principles order the rest of ethical instruction. Another way of putting it is to say something like this: the purpose or justification behind a specific rule or command carries greater weight than the specific rule itself. We often find biblical commands (such as not boiling a baby goat in its own mother’s milk) that don’t seem to have any clear application to us today. At that point we ask, what was the purpose of that command? Is there some greater rationale or covering principle that lies behind the giving of this command to that people in their cultural context? If we can discern that larger purpose, we can see why and when the command no longer applies (and even when we might do the opposite behavior in order to fulfill the greater, original purpose).⁸

- ii. **Area Principles:** Other rules and commands are more “middle level” in nature. They are principles that can be applied in different ways, depending on the context and the people involved. In this sense they are more like “area” principles—relevant for this or that area of life, but not necessarily applicable to other areas of life. For example, “You shall not bear false witness.” Many of the Ten Commandments are area principles, dealing with a given situation and context. In this case the context is a legal proceeding where your testimony may result in justice or injustice. You are not to allow considerations of money, kinship or hatred to color your account of what you know happened as you give testimony in court. It is first of all a rule for judicial hearings. Of course, it has wider implications, as we shall see. Truth-telling is not limited to just this area of life.
- iii. **Specific rules:** Then there are very specific rules that are limited to a particular situation or a particular action. Here’s a rule about the harvest: “When you reap the harvest of our land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the foreigner.” (Leviticus 19:9-10) This is very specific guidance. It takes a given instance of harvest time and spells out what “love and justice” may look like among God’s people. This is a rule that fits the familial paradigm of the Old Testament. The virtue of hospitality means making provisions for the abundant produce of the land to serve the needs of all, including widows, orphans and strangers. One expression of that hospitality was the way harvests were carried out.

There is a principle behind this specific instruction, but the stated rule is very detailed and concrete. Just a few verses later we read, “Do not hold back the wages of a hired worker overnight.” (Leviticus 19:13). This comes in a day where day laborers were to be paid daily, but this rule may not be applicable to today’s hired workers who may be paid weekly or monthly. The point of the instruction is very specific, but the principle or justification behind it is one of justice and care for the worker who has very few resources. Pay in a timely fashion so such workers can meet their pressing needs.

The Ten Commandments contain both covering and area principles. Jesus’ words about the weightier things of the law and about the Great Commandment help us understand the various elements of these words in terms of their level and their intent.

⁸ For more on this, see Charles H. Cosgrove, *Appealing to Scripture in Moral Debate: Five Hermeneutical Principles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), pp. 12-50.

Think About It

Answer Box # 5

1. Can you think of some commands in the Bible that your church or Christian group no longer consider applicable for Christians? List two or three.
2. Why do you think your Christian community thinks those commands do not apply? Is there some higher level principle involved? What might it be? Or, are these biblical imperatives just “cultural” matters for an ancient day?

3. How are the Ten Commandments different from civil laws?

The Ten Commandments are not the same as the laws made by our national assemblies. One difference between the Ten Commandments and civil law is that they concern the inward state of the heart, not just outward behavior. The eye of God, from which nothing escapes, regards not just our outward appearance and actions. It penetrates to our hearts. God is concerned with the purity and integrity of our thoughts and desires. God wants to shape our spirits as well as our acts. God warns not only against just murder, adultery and theft, but also wrath, hatred, covetousness, greed and lust. Jesus taught that our outward actions are the fruit of the inner state of our hearts. (Matthew 15:18-20; Proverbs 4:23) In reading the Ten Commandments we need to see that God is seeking the purity of our minds and hearts, not just our obedience to laws governing outward acts.

One of the strange phenomena of our days is the way government and business officials consider their behavior “ethical” so long as they obey the laws that govern them. If the behavior is not “against the law” then it must be “ethically” upright conduct, yet ethics goes further than law. Laws only cover certain relationships and arenas of life. They grow out of a people’s sense of what is right, but they do not cover all of life the way ethics does.

It is not illegal for me to neglect my family, to be absent from my children’s birthdays or not to provide for the needs of my mother in her old age when she lacks resources. There are no laws that compel me to give my child an affirming embrace and a delightful gift to celebrate his or her birthday, but it is unwise socially, and certainly unethical in terms of my obligations as a parent, when I choose not to do so when I have the means to do those very life-giving actions.

My obligations to my family and to fellow humans are not exhausted by what the law dictates. In business relationships, I can follow all the regulations and current standards in dealing with a client or another organization and be thoroughly unethical in my conduct. The law may not compel or prescribe “full disclosure” of all the defects of a property I am selling to a customer. I may know that there are serious problems with contamination from toxic substances on the property and that the building was constructed with sub-standard materials and will soon need substantial repairs. The laws and regulations may not require me to disclose these to a potential buyer, but knowing them and not disclosing them is unethical. I can keep the law precisely but violate good ethical standards. The two are related but not identical.

4. The Ten Commandments point us toward both God and humanity

Many writers observe that the Ten Commandments fall into two parts.⁹ The first part concerns our love and worship of God, and this is the first and foundational element of Christian morality. The second part concerns our loving responsibilities toward other human beings. Many people think of ethics as involving only our relationships to people, but our relationship to God is even more fundamental. God sent strong messages of warning to the Old Testament prophets to tell Israel that although they obeyed many of God’s laws externally, their hearts were far from God. This was not acceptable to God. Idolatry violated

⁹ In this observation we are following a long tradition dividing the two “tables” of the law into a primarily God-ward and primarily human-ward direction. Not all have agreed that this division is the best way of thinking about them. Some argue all Ten apply both to our relationship with God and fellow humans. We learn about how to treat one another from the guidelines for treating God (and how God treats us) and for what is an authentic relationship with God from how we treat fellow human beings, those who image God. We will make some suggestions about how this two-fold relevancy appears in each command.

love of God. Injustice violated love of fellow human beings. The prophets underscored the two great commands that Jesus focused on as well.

The two parts of the law go together in God's plan. Love and respect for God are the foundations for love and justice toward human beings. The first four commandments teach us how to honor God. The second six commandments teach us how to conduct ourselves toward our fellow human beings. Jesus recognized these two parts of the law when he summarized them in loving God with all our heart, soul and mind, and in loving our neighbor as ourselves. (Matthew 22:37; Luke 10:27)

Let's get started looking at some specifics of the Ten Commandments.

B. Our attitudes and actions toward God (Exodus 20:1-11)

The first four commandments focus primarily on our relationship with God. When first given through Moses to God's people, they began with an important reminder or preface. This is the "indicative" of what God does for us before the imperatives of what God requires from us.

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. (Exodus 20:2)

By beginning with these words, God starts with what God does for us.¹⁰ Ethics is a response to what God has done for us. This reminds Israel that God has set them free from slavery. The commands that follow this reminder are commands for a life of freedom. They are not commands to restrict and enslave. They are imperatives for the life of freedom God has granted them by rescuing them from slavery. It is as though God said, "I have freed you, and now here is how a life of true freedom looks—You shall...and you shall..."

At the same time, God reminds the people of his right to be obeyed. God is the Lord, their God. God also reminds them of God's love for them. God is their liberator from the oppression of their life in Egypt. Salvation from Egyptian slavery is a model of the salvation that is now ours through Jesus Christ. Reminding them of God's just authority and gracious love, God issues commands so that God's people can recognize responsible freedom .

Commandments 1-4

One: You shall have no other gods before me.

Negatively, Israel is to reject the false gods of the surrounding nations. Positively, the people are to give glory and adoration exclusively to Yahweh, their creator and deliverer. This is not only a command to flee idols but also a command to run to the living and true God. Immediately, heart attitudes are challenged by this command. God's people are to devote themselves wholly to God with their hearts and with their worship. God is to be the ultimate reference of all their actions. God commands *a relationship of exclusivity and uniqueness*.¹¹ There is no other relationship that is to rival this one. God alone is supreme, uppermost in life and central to all aspects.

John Calvin suggested that this devotion to God consisted of four essential duties: "(1) Adoration, the reverence that creature gives to him, submitting to his greatness; (2) Trust, the assurance of heart that we have in him; (3) Prayer, the recourse that our soul has to him, as its only hope, when it is pressed by some need; (4) Thanksgiving, the gratitude by which the praise of all good things is given to him." (Institutes, II.8.16)

The Heidelberg Catechism, in response to Question 94¹², "What does God enjoin in the first commandment?", answers: "That I, as sincerely as I desire the salvation of my own soul, avoid and flee from all idolatry, (a) sorcery, soothsaying, superstition, (b) invocation of saints, or any other creatures; (c) and learn rightly to know the only true God; (d) trust in him alone, (e) with humility (f) and patience submit to him; (g) expect all good things from him only; (h) love, (i) fear, (j) and glorify him with my whole heart; (k) so that I renounce and forsake all creatures, rather than commit even the least thing contrary to his will. (l)"

This command highlights the exclusivity and uniqueness of relationship we are to give to God and God gives to each of us. God knows each of us by name. Each of us is irreplaceable in God's love. God holds to each of us as the object of God's particular faithful love. Later, the Bible takes this divine love as a mirror for the marriage relationship. Marital love is to be unique and exclusive, given to only one other. Just as we are to allow none other to rival our love and relationship with God, so we are not to allow another human to rival our exclusive and unique love for our spouse.

¹⁰ When we look at the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy we must remember that this clause is not the only indication that what God does for us comes before what we are to do for God. Deuteronomy 1-4 recites many of the things that God had done for Israel.

¹¹ See David W. Gill, *Doing Right*, op. cit., pp. 79-96. He titles his chapter for this command: "Nobody but You: Uniqueness and Exclusivity."

¹² <http://www.reformed.org/documents/index.html?mainframe=http://www.reformed.org/documents/heidelberg.html>

More generally, this command instills a habit that teaches how we are to love truly. Our neighbor and fellow human (stranger and enemy alike) are made in God's image. The impulse of love is always exclusivity and uniqueness. The greatest area for that is marriage. No other human bond is to rival the love for our spouse, but it is the initial impulse in other relationships as well. In learning to love God, we learn how to love one another. For example, employees should feel valued and unique before their employers and colleagues. In that sort of environment people can flourish and release their gifts into productive work.

Think About It

Answer Box # 6

If we give God our primary worship and loyalty, what implications do you think that has for the way you live? How would you know if you have "other gods before" the true and living God? What are the reasons for your answer?

Two: You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them.

The first command dealt with having a relationship. This second deals with an activity. God did not wish God's people to seek to have a relationship by making some object. The first command tells us the object of our worship. This command deals with the mode of our worship. The first outlawed any images of other gods. This outlaws physical images of the living God. Anything we can make cannot adequately represent God. It can only become a substitute that displaces God from God's rightful place in our lives.¹³

We are not to form a false idea of God. Hence, God was not to be represented by any visible shapes, nor were any images to be worshipped. God is spirit and desires spiritual worship as Jesus later taught. (John 4:24) The only authorized object on earth worthy of worship is Jesus of Nazareth, the God-man, who is the exact representation of God's nature. (Hebrews 1:3)

Why is idol or image making so wrong? God reserves the right to say who God is. We are not to construct our own ideas of God, to creatively imagine what sort of being God must be, if there be a god. God has revealed God's self, and we must conform our ideas and images of God accordingly. Our images of God must conform to God's reality, and nothing physically constructed can do that. We are not to remake God in our own image. By attempting to make an image of the living God, we usurp God's place. God has already chosen to give testimony as to God's being, first of all by words, but also by other signs and means. We are God's Creation. God is not our creation.

Idols direct our worship downward, to something that can only be partial, lesser, lower than God. It creates a fixed, dead image of One who is living and free. It violates justice in that it does not and cannot give God appropriate merit. We worship the creature rather than the Creator. In the end, idolatry is wrong because God has created the perfect and only acceptable image of God in the True Human, Jesus Christ. He alone is the definitive and full image of the invisible God. We humans bear the image of God but only imperfectly in our sinful state.

Idolatry is to contrive, or have any other object, in which men place their trust, instead of, or besides that one true God, who has manifested himself in his word. (Heidelberg Q. 95)

As was the case with the first command, we need to remind ourselves that God does not replace us with some image or relate to us through some abstract system of ideas. God relates to us as we are and works with us.

This too has implications for our human relationships. We are not to create false images of another human being, imagining them as someone and something they are not. Stereotyping others or engaging in slander and gossip violate what we learn from this command. It does so by communicating ideas and images of our spouse or friends that are distortions and denigrations of who they are. Because they are in the image of God, we must treat them with dignity and respect as we portray them in our words. We do not treat them as fixed, unchangeable objects but as living humans in the image of God.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 97-117.

We are not to substitute images of our spouses, children, or coworkers for the complex living beings they are. Nor are we to make stereotypes (images) of other ethnicities or national groups, of the opposite sex, or even of ourselves. How constraining and debilitating are images others (or we) construct and then try to live up to rather than accepting the gifts and graces of who we are as God intended.

Clearly, the worship of any image is forbidden, but images (or icons) have played an educational role in the church, especially in light of the fact that God visually represented God's self in the God-man, Jesus Christ. Medieval abuses of images led some Protestant reformers of the 16th century to resist their use. Christians need to be sensitive to one another's feelings about the use of icons on which the practices of the Church have varied greatly. Art has a real role to play in Christian life and worship, not as sacred images to worship but as instruments offered up in the service of the living God who can only be imaged by something living.

Three: You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain (or You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord...)

God's people were not to profane or misuse the name of God, for it represents all that he is.¹⁴ They were to think and only speak of God with the honor God is due. God is wise, just and good. Our words are always to reflect God's dignity.

A conversation often begins by saying a name, and we often acknowledge the other person with whom we have a relationship by saying his or her name. Using the proper name for someone shows that we know to whom we speak. How we say the name indicates our attitude and posture toward them. Sometimes using a name is a way of asserting authority or power. Sometimes we whisper the name of the one we fear may be coming and discover our misdeed. Sometimes we say our own name to identify ourselves. What name we use and how we say it signals our posture toward the one we name.

This command requires that we not to invoke God's name lightly, frivolously, or for selfish reasons. It is a wrongful use to invoke God's name when we intend to revile, blaspheme, abuse or even swear falsely with God's name. To say the name of God over an offering when our hearts are cold and indifferent to God is to use it wrongfully. It is hypocritical. We profess the name but do not live the life that is godly.

Rather, we are to use the name reverently, with joy. We are to share the name and invoke it over our pleasures and pains, over our successes and failures, in thanksgiving for health and in petition for healing in sickness. This command invites us to use the name of God properly. Over the years, Jews have wrongly deduced that they were not to say the name of God at all for fear of misusing it. In reading Scripture they substitute "Lord" (*adonai*) where the proper name of God appears. Sensitivity to this is seen even in the Gospels where Matthew, writing to Jewish disciples of Jesus and reflecting their sensitivity in this matter, changes the phrase "Kingdom of God" to "Kingdom of heaven," avoiding using God's name.

This command has special application to oaths. An oath is calling God to witness the truth of what we say. It is a form of divine worship. To swear falsely is to profane God and to rob God of truth. John Calvin wrote, "I hold, therefore, that there is no better rule than so to regulate our oaths that they shall neither be rash, frivolous, promiscuous, nor passionate, but be made to serve a just necessity; in other words, to vindicate the glory of God, or promote the edification of a brother." (Institutes, II.8.27)

A Lutheran catechism composed in Chad offers a prayer for obedience to each commandment. For this commandment the one who prays asks, "O God,...enable us to respect you and to love you enough that we do not use your name for cursing, for making vows, for practicing magic, for lying or for deceiving, but rather for praying to you, for praising you and for thanking you."

This command has application at the human level as well. Think of your close friend or your spouse. We are not to misuse their name or sully their honor by speaking about them in ways that degrade them. One thinks of an angry or hostile husband who starts out a complaint about his wife with the phrase, "My wife, the bitch..." or the wife who says, "My husband, the bastard..." It is inappropriate for us to speak sweet words to a colleague or our spouse, only to turn around behind their back and call them derogatory names. In not making wrongful use of God's name, we learn not to do the same with our fellow humans' names.

It also has a more extended application to the sorts of labels we put on one another. We know how easy it was as a child and even as an adult to impose a demeaning, trivializing or derogatory name on others (epithets, slurs, degrading nicknames, or stereotypes that put people down or "in their place"). Instead of calling a person by their name, we say "boy" or "woman" as a way of imposing power over them and signaling that they matter not in their uniqueness or individuality. They are treated as a mere servant to us, a living tool to do something for us.

Jesus tells us of the danger of using degrading, derogatory "names" for others (Matthew 5:22) when anger fuels our abusive tongue. Naming others is a way of affirming their uniqueness and signaling

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 120-139.

our own interest in and care for them. The command about how we utter God's name and the ways we use it also teaches us how we are to treat those made in his image.

Think About It

Answer Box # 7

1. What are ways God's name is profaned in your environment?
2. Are there ways in which people's "names" are profaned in your environment?
3. Do you think it is ever justified to "swear religiously by the name of God?"

Heidelberg Q. 101 says of oaths using God's name: "Yes: either when the magistrates demand it of the subjects; or when necessity requires us thereby to confirm a fidelity and truth to the glory of God, and the safety of our neighbor: for such an oath is founded on God's word, and therefore was justly used by the saints, both in the Old and New Testament."

Four: Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall not do any work...

This is a double command, both to work and to rest. It is rooted in a tradition that predates the Decalogue. It has reference back to the story of Creation, when God "rested" from work. Even in the Exodus wanderings, manna was gathered only on six days. The rhythm of work punctuated with rest is rooted in Creation as well as in the deliverance of Israel from their constant labor as slaves.¹⁵

Jesus taught that the Sabbath was for the service of God and human beings. The Sabbath did not supersede the needs of human beings or the One who commanded space in our schedule for rest and delight in God's good gifts. The Sabbath is a sign that God is the One whose work is definitive. We can cease from our ordinary work once a week in acknowledgement that God's work is greater than our own. We can trust God to meet our needs with six days of our concerted work.

Some Christian writers teach that the external observance of a particular day was no longer necessary after the coming of Christ. John Calvin offers the following commentary on this question

First, under the rest of the seventh day, the divine Lawgiver meant to furnish the people of Israel with a type of the spiritual rest by which believers were to cease from their own works, and allow God to work in them. Secondly, he meant that there should be a stated day on which they should assemble to hear the Law, and perform religious rites, or which, at least, they should specially employ in meditating on his works, and be thereby trained to piety. Thirdly, he meant that servants, and those who lived under the authority of others, should be indulged with a day of rest, and thus have some intermission from labor. (Institutes, II.8.28)

Calvin firmly believed that this commandment still retains important implications for us today. The focus of the day is to remember that God is our Creator and all the bounty of the goodness of Creation comes from God. We steward it and draw from it marvelous elements that sustain and enrich human life, but we remember the Sabbath.

We observe it when we structure one day in the week so that it is a delight, a "holy" day (holy means separated, different). It is a chance to focus on doing some things with God just as the other six days we do things for God. We cease our work and rest (spiritually and emotionally as well as physically). We embrace some activities that enable us to focus on God. We feast on the goodness and grace of God through music, beauty, food and affection. *It is observed when it brings delight, joy and renewal.* It is not a grim day of not doing this or that.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 140-160.

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This command is not legalism, as though it is the day that is sacred. God is sacred and makes the day special. It is not a violation of the day when we occasionally must work on it. The purpose of the Sabbath was for the sake of blessing all families. Crises and harvest time sometimes dictate working straight through “the Sabbath.” This is because the six days of working are not “profane” instead of “sacred.” This is a command that balances work and rest.

We need to remember that the other six days are surrounded by the command of God. We love God through the labor of our hands and mind just as really and importantly as we love God through Sabbath worship. We were made to work, to be entrepreneurial, creative and productive. Work can be enslaving and dehumanizing as was the slave labor of Israel in Egypt. God delivered Israel from that, not so every day could be a Sabbath, but so that their work might have the freedom and potential to fulfill the Creator’s design for work. A true Sabbath is a rest from true work. There is a balance here.

At best, work is creative and good. It serves all life and is an expression of our love of the neighbor as well as love of God. Good work is done with the neighbor. It is done not only for them but also with them. Technology has transformed the conditions of work but not eliminated the need to be productive through the gifts and skills we have and are acquiring. At best, work does not become the center of our identity or turn us into “workaholics.” This is where the regular Sabbath interruption conditions and corrects our idolatry of human achievement and work.

This fourth command thus embraces our time. *There is not a single day of the week that does not belong to God.* Whether we are at work or at rest, God is the horizon of our life and the meaning of our existence. This rhythm of work/rest is good for us and good for our neighbors, colleagues and employees. Work and not-working belongs to God. When we structure our organizations and the work required from our employees, we must not be pious Christians at prayer and rest while we work others nearly to death. God has instructed us to create a rhythm of work and rest that serves our fellow humans.

A catechism in the Anglican Book of Common Prayer summarizes the thrust of these first four commandments:

My duty towards God, is to believe in him, to fear him, and to love him with all my heart, with all my mind, with all my soul, and with all my strength; to worship him, to give him thanks, to put my whole trust in him, to call upon him, to honor his holy Name and his Word, and to serve him truly all the days of my life.¹⁶

The fourth commandment concludes the first part of the law that explains what God expected of the hearts and actions of God’s people regarding the worship and service of God. God is the only worthy and true God, the creator and savior. God commands exclusive worship of God’s self while rightly forbidding the worship of any other gods who, in reality, are no gods at all. God invites God’s followers to use the freedom given to them to bless God and all the families of the earth.

Think About It

Answer Box # 8

1. Having examined the first four commandments that God gave to Moses (Exodus 20:3-11), how do you feel about the place are you giving God in your life?
2. If God is to have God’s rightful place in your life, in light of how Jesus understood these four commandments (Matthew 22:37-38), what new decisions might you consider making?

Models: Noah

Noah is another person mentioned in the Faithful Witnesses Hall of Fame presented to us in Hebrews 11.

Believing God's promise

(Genesis 6:5-22; Hebrews 11:7; II Peter 2:5)

Read the above biblical texts before continuing to read the module.

¹⁶ BCM, 1628 version. Online: <http://www.eskimo.com/~lhowell/bcp1662/baptism/catchism.html#TenCommandments>
Ethics For Living and Leading, Version 3.0

Noah was a man who lived in an evil human environment. Human society was so corrupt and full of violence that God decided to destroy the human race. (Genesis 6:5-13) However, Noah's life pleased God. He was just and walked with God. Therefore, God told him how to build an ark that would save him, his family, and the earth's living creatures. (Genesis 6:14-22) Noah obeyed God's word to him and also preached justice to his world. (Hebrews 11:7; II Peter 2:5) God's judgment fell, but Noah and all those with him in the ark were saved.

Noah falls into **the familial and prophetic paradigm**. His faith in the word of God is what preserved the human race in a time of great corruption and crisis. 2 Peter calls him a "preacher of righteousness." The role of the prophet is to bring the word of God to the actions of people and the structures of society. Speaking the word has the purpose of bringing clarity from the divine perspective. It is communicated to humans who are often deceived. In their ethical confusion, they are not aware of what is at stake.

The word of the prophet judges (positively or negatively) the actions and conditions that are present in light of the ethical values of the Kingdom of God. Most often the word of judgment is aimed at the leaders of the people and invokes the values of their role. Kings are warned when their reign over the people does not produce just ways and just processes. Priests are judged when they corrupt the worship of God and encourage unholy practices among the people. Everyday actions are judged in terms of wisdom, and those who perpetrate false wisdom are confronted with the judgment of God. Even other "prophets" who are false are judged in terms of the obligation of a prophet, not to speak unless they have a word from God. The prophet calls leaders back to faithfulness to the calling and obligations of their roles. For the people as a whole, the prophet calls them to live in terms of justice, holiness and wisdom, all motivated and shaped by the word of God.

Like most prophets, Noah suffered for the sake of the word of God that he spoke. Most prophets face resistance, opposition, rejection and even persecution. Their temptation is to find some easier way of preaching "the word of God," something pleasant to the ears of their hearers, something that would be popular. Prophets became the characteristic figure who stood faithfully for the word and ways of the Lord even to the point of extreme suffering (one thinks most dramatically of the prophet Jesus, foreshadowed by the weeping prophet, Jeremiah).

Here is a summary of how Noah lived:

- **His ethical challenge:** to believe God for a flood that no one else believed in; to preach righteous living to unrighteous people.
- **His ethical action:** to obey God's command to build a huge ark; to speak the truth to unbelievers.
- **His temptation:** to live like the rest of society; to not speak or act in a way that seemed foolish to his contemporaries.
- **The cost of his doing what was right:** social scorn and rejection.
- **The reward of doing what was right:** salvation from the flood for himself and his family.

Think About It

Answer Box # 9

1. Have you experienced a conflict between what is socially acceptable and what is right in God's sight? What did you do? How did you feel about your action? What might have happened if you had done the other thing?
2. Would you like to live differently in the future? If so, how?

Summary

In this unit we began a journey through Scripture to discover its relevance to guide us in our ethical conduct. We discovered that both Jesus and Paul used the Old Testament as God's authoritative word. In particular, we find both of them repeating nine of the Ten Commandments as valid ethical

guidance for human beings. They are ten “signposts” to freedom (to use Jan Lochman’s terms¹⁷). They are meant to inform us how life can flourish for us and our neighbors. Live by these imperatives, Jesus and Paul say, and you will be doing the will of God for human life. We spent most of the time following David W. Gill’s exposition of the first four of the Ten Commandments. There we learn how uniqueness and exclusivity are to mark our relationships with God and other human beings. Our images of God and our fellow humans are not to be distorted or demeaning. We are not to substitute our own ideas for the complex reality of who God is and who others are. Our speech is to reflect the dignity of the person we speak about, always, in all conversations. That includes our speaking of God and our speaking of other human beings. Finally, our life is offered the rhythm of work and rest. We are invited to be productive with our gifts and bless our generation with our work, activity that is done for God. Then, one day in seven is to be different, set aside. It is a day of joy, rest and delight where we remember God takes care of us. We need not drive ourselves into the ground by working round the clock, nor is the work we do for God more important than the work God does for us. Sabbath rest is a gift given for our benefit.

Unit 6 Final Assignment

Final Assignment

1. Write on one to two pages your thoughts about how the lives of people in your church or organization might change if they took very seriously the practical implications of the first four commandments that God gave to Moses as recorded in Exodus 20.
2. Write on one to two pages your thoughts about “authority” in your life in terms of the major ethical decisions you make. What are the primary sources of guidance for you deciding what you do and why you do it?
3. Please confirm that you have discussed the results of your interactive work in Unit 6 (“Think About It” boxes) with a group of two other people. (See “Note on Process” on page v in the “Expectations for the Course” section of the Introduction to the Course.)
4. Given what you have read in the assigned readings from Stott (97-134), what do you think are the challenges to thinking clearly about war and peace? While Christians share the same sources as their authority, they obviously come to different conclusions about the legitimacy of violence and war. Do you agree with John Stott’s analysis and suggestions? Why or why not?

When your work is complete (three to five pages total), send a copy to your facilitator via email as an attachment. Please send it by the date indicated in the Module Calendar.

¹⁷ *Signposts to Freedom: The Ten Commandments and Christian Ethics* (Augsburg: Minneapolis, 1982)
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Ethics for Living and Leading

Unit 7

What is the Central Challenge of Christian Ethics?



Development Associates International

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Unit 7 - What is the Central Challenge of Christian Ethics? (How we treat other people)

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Learning Objectives:

By the end of this unit you will be able to:

- List a number of elements that are essential parts of our ethical responsibilities toward other people;
- Explain the work of the Holy Spirit in enabling us to live and lead ethically;
- Analyze the ethical decisions of biblical character;
- Indicate ways in which an Islamic worldview influences moral behavior.

Steps to Complete Unit 7

Read and Respond

Readings are included at the end of most units. These texts provide biblical and cultural framework for an adequate understanding of Christian ethics. Please reflect and respond as indicated in assignments found within the texts.

Supplementary text: John R. W. Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, 4th Edition (Zondervan 2006). For Unit 7, please read Stott, pp. 325-387 (Women, Men and God; Marriage, Cohabitation and Divorce)

Lecture Notes & Workbook

Overview

If we were to distill the very essence of attitudes and behavior for ethical living and leading as Christians in the most compact way possible, we might say that it's Christ-likeness or reflecting God's character. I'd like to suggest another way of saying it in five short words: the heart of Christian ethics is "how we treat other people."

The answer to that proposition is that "we are to love all other people and ensure justice." However, often the words "love" and "justice" are used in so many different ways that sometimes it is hard to know what they really mean. To formulate the issue as "how we treat other people" almost forces one to ask the question of oneself, "How do I treat other people? With respect? With dignity? With fairness? With compassion? With forgiveness? With love? Every day? All the time? No matter what person?"

Those are very personal, probing questions for me, and I now find myself praying daily, "Lord, help me to live this day well. Help me to treat each person with whom I communicate in a way that would please you, in the sort of way you might treat them." I need to ask myself every morning, "How do I intend to treat other people today?" Every night I need to ask myself, "How did I treat everyone with whom I had contact today? Were you pleased, Lord Jesus?" This is so important for me because I'm naturally more of an introvert than an extrovert. I'm more naturally turned in on myself than I am inclined outward toward others, so, what I believe Jesus taught to be the heart of Christian ethics is a great challenge for me personally.

We start with another case study that suggests how difficult it is at times to decide what we are bound to do by duty, love and justice as we seek to live well.

I. Case Study: Let's Get Married¹

Ashish pushed the samosas on his plate absent mindedly. "What's the problem?" asked Prakesh. "You don't seem to be here." The two junior traders were eating in a restaurant in London's financial district.

"This is it," Ashish said. "My parents called last night and informed me they have found the right girl for me to marry. It's just awful. I haven't had enough time yet to get established in the stock market, and I thought my parents would wait at least three to four years after I finished university and got this job. But, bang, six months later they have settled the matter!"

It had been several months since Ashish had had lunch with his friend Prakesh from MBA days in university. His life had been on the fast track as a currency trader, and work had been all-consuming. He had been exposed to a part of life he had not known existed. The pressures and demands of the job were amazing, but even more amazing was his enjoyment at living on the edge of multi-million pound or dollar disasters.

He was thinking, what a difference a few years make. Moving from Bangalore just seven years ago, the first years in England had been difficult with all the cultural changes and challenges. But Ashish had met other Indians through Shruti, the South Asian student organization that had become a major part of his life. He had many good friends through Shruti, including Prakesh.

"No, surely this is wonderful," replied Prakesh. "Tell me about your future bride. Where is she from? What's her family like? Is she fair, or can't you tell from her picture?"

"She's from Bombay, and she must be from a good family or my parents would not have selected her," said Ashish. "But you don't seem to understand. The timing is wrong. I don't want to get married now. I'm just getting into this trading job and need to set some real money by for a family. I can't take time off now without hindering my prospects at the firm. It's all too fast."

"What do you mean, 'all too fast'," Prakesh retorted. "There's never much warning once a suitable bride has been found. Look at Gupta. Once his parents found the right woman, he was married in two weeks. Besides, if the right one has been found, why wait?"

"But I'm not ready. I want some time for myself. Besides, I'm not sure I want to go home. I love my parents. I know they only want the best for me, but I live in a different world now. A bride from India isn't best for my world. I don't want to be smothered again like I was in India. I want to be independent, to be self-sufficient, but I don't want to hurt my parents either," replied Ashish.

Prakesh stared incredulously at his friend. "I hope you didn't say that to your parents, did you?"

"Of course not. I'm not that disrespectful," said Ashish, "but I've got to find a way to stop them. You've got to help me."

¹ Based on a case from R.W. Wolfe and C. E. Gudorf, eds. *Ethics and World Religions: Cross-Cultural Case Studies* (Maryknoll, Orbis Books: 1999), pp. 86-91.

Prakesh was silent for a minute. Then he said, "I don't know how I can do that. It's a son's duty to marry and have children. How else will a family line be preserved? Besides, it's the duty of your parents to find the right bride. What do you know about choosing a bride, anyway?"

"Actually, a lot," retorted Ashish. "My cousin Jagesh is a case in point. The process seemed never-ending. My uncle insisted on the same subcaste, and then there was the issue of class. She had to be from a well-to-do family, able to bring a well-stocked bridal trunk, given the size of my cousin's family. So, the dowry was important. Needless to say, she had to be light skinned, and only a girl from India would do. My uncle and aunt who have lived here in England for many years have a poor opinion of most Indian-British girls. From their perspective only a 'real' Indian girl knows her proper place in the family."

"You may have a point there," said Prakesh. "Look at many of the girls from Shruti—they're a pretty independent group. I mean, they're fun to be with, but I wouldn't want to marry one. They're just not trained properly. How are they going to show proper respect to the men in the family or the senior women? They don't know all the customs. It's also hard to check out their subcaste from London. It's safer to get a bride with the help of relatives and long-standing family friends in India."

"I don't know about that," replied Ashish. "I've seen some of those marriages. I mean, think about Rajendra and Chandrakan. She doesn't seem to be suited to him. She's so quiet it's hard to tell whether she knows how to speak. And with her village ways, she seems more like his servant than his wife. I certainly don't want to marry a girl like that."

One of the realities of our world is that we live in the midst of global movements of people, not just information, music, fashion styles, products, brands and religion. Ashish and Prakesh live between a traditional world of arranged marriages where the will and word of elders and parents were virtually law. Respect for elders still is a strong value and theme in many cultures, not just in India, as well as issues dealing with caste, class, ethnicity and tribe. The feelings of important family members cannot be ignored but neither can the reality that the world is changing and that the younger generation has very different perspectives and feelings about things.

Think About It

Answer Box # 1

1. What advice would you give Ashish? What do you think he should do? What are your reasons for your advice?
2. How are things changing in your context on this issue? How are the wishes of parents and the choices of children considered in issues of marriage partners? Is there a difference in treatment between young men and young women? How are these arrangements justified, ethically?

There are no simple answers to these matters. Still, we must move with the times and bring with us the best wisdom we have from Scripture. I remember when I (David) became a Christian in my early teen years. I came from a divorced home. Father and Mother (and step-mother) had different wishes and priorities for my life. When I discovered the biblical imperative to "honor father and mother" I was in a dilemma. How was I to do that when my mother and father had different plans and priorities for my life? I needed more than simply the principles of Scripture, but I never felt I could excuse myself because of the dilemma. I had to pray and seek wisdom as to how to honor them both. However, that is another story to be told another time.

Ashish and others like him face a different set of dilemmas due to our global world. Nevertheless, the first thing we need to do is be as clear as we can on what God asks of us in responsible obedience as his children, freed from our slavery to sin.

One of the reasons that I (Jack) find commandments 5 through 10 in Exodus 20 so helpful is that they offer specific guidance on how to treat other people as well as how not to treat them. I memorized all ten commandments of the Decalogue many years ago and have found them to offer much needed

wisdom and direction. I can understand why in so many of his Psalms David spoke of his love for God's commandments. They were a beacon for him. He called God's word a lamp to his feet and a light for his path. (Psalm 119:105) The Decalogue is at the heart of what David knew and referred to in God's word and law.

In this unit we want to begin by looking briefly at commandments five through ten for the ethical guidance they offer for us today. Then we will look briefly at two things, the instructions in the Sermon on the Mount and the role of the Spirit in helping us to be obedient to God's moral law. We also want to analyze an ethical dilemma that Abraham faced. In the readings you will have the opportunity of thinking about the ethical impact of an Islamic worldview and the challenges it might present to Christians living in a Muslim context.

II. How to treat other human beings (Exodus 20:12-17)

Commandments five to ten explain how God desires God's people to treat their fellow human beings, those created in God's image and loved by God.²

Five: Honor your father and your mother.

This command (to adult children) is expressed in numerous ways in the Old Testament. (Exodus 21:15, 17; Leviticus 20:9; Deuteronomy 21:18-21; 27:16; Proverbs 1:8; 15:5; 19:26) Both parents are included (with mother first in Leviticus 19:3). To honor them is to treat them with dignity, deference, humility and love.

This command stands out among the ten as does the fourth because it is a positive prescription (all the other eight start out with "you shall not..."). Our worth and dignity is not limited to those days when we work hard and rest for one day in seven. Even those who are old, our fathers and mothers, who may no longer be economically productive, merit our honor. We honor them as the agents and representatives of God, those whom God used to give us life. Often they are also those who shared the gift of spiritual life with us as they introduced us to the workings of our world and mentored us into adulthood.

This command is not based on some performance evaluation (how well they did). Even with their weaknesses and failings, they were commissioned to be God's agents and representatives toward their children. We honor them because of the role God gave them in our lives. There are limits to that "honoring," as Paul indicates ("Children, obey your parents *in the Lord*..." Ephesians 6:1). There are abusive and corrupt parents who may need a child to get away from them and find help for them. We honor them by serving their best interest and by limiting our obedience to them by the gospel-honoring life to which God calls us.

Jesus repeated this commandment to the Pharisees and scribes, calling upon them to do good to their parents instead of neglecting them. (Matthew 15:4-9) The way in which children treat their parents will differ from one ethnic group to another, but the principles of obedience to parents by young children and the honoring of parents by adult children are consistent with the teaching of both the Old and New Testaments. John Calvin states that honor, gratitude and obedience to parents are the substance of this command. The ones who lovingly transmitted life to us here on earth are the first ones to whom God asks us to give special honor. Insult, ingratitude and contempt for parents are violations of this command. Ideally, parents are to be cherished and, at very least, to be honored.

Shockingly, Jesus even speaks of setting parents and children *against* one another. (Matthew 10:35, 37 "I have come to set a man against his father.") It is clear that he subordinates the honor and respect due to parents to the commitment we owe first and foremost to God. We must love and honor our heavenly Father in ways that greatly supersede but do not negate our bond with our parents. Jesus also speaks of the formation of a new family, the family of God. In that fellowship we call one another brother and sister. Jesus committed his own mother into the hands of the beloved disciple. (John 19:25-27)

In learning to honor our parents as agents and representatives of God, we learn also how to honor our neighbor. We are schooled in tough lessons of living well long-term with our elders. Out of that crucible comes wisdom in living long and well with others.

² Once again we want to acknowledge our dependence upon the exposition of Dr. David W. Gill, *Doing Right: Practicing Ethical Principles* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), pp. 161-33. Much of what we offer on these six commandments closely parallels his account.

Think About It

Answer Box # 2

Should our behavior toward our parents, as authority figures, be extended toward others in positions of authority over us?

A Baptist catechism indicates that this fifth commandment "...requires that we obey and honor our parents, and all who are set over us in the providence of God; and that we render to all persons that honor and duty which are suitable to their station and character."

Heidelberg Q. 104 agrees. "That I show all honor, love and fidelity, to my father and mother, and all in authority over me, and submit myself to their good instruction and correction, with due obedience; and also patiently bear with their weaknesses and infirmities, since it pleases God to govern us by their hand."³

Think About It

Answer Box # 3

Write down one way in which you can better observe this commandment.

Six: You shall not murder.

This command is sometimes seen only as a prohibition against killing. While the illegitimate taking of another person's life is clearly forbidden by God, the command goes much deeper and wider. This is a command about guarding and fostering the life of others. It probes all our situations where human life is ended, from abortion to euthanasia, from executing a murderer to waging war, from suicide to creating products with deadly flaws in them. We need also to remember that the first murder was Cain's killing of his brother Abel.

This command is at the beginning of a series of guidelines that constitute a healthy and good human life. This series starts here because it creates the condition for every other relationship and action. The ending of life ends all the other possibilities. Therefore, the first word in these last five commands is this: do not end a life illegitimately. In murder we cross the final barrier in relationship to another human. We take the ultimate step in ending human conduct and conflict; we take life away irreversibly, permanently and completely.

Murder is wrong because it usurps the prerogative of God. God is the only one with the right to give and take life. It is wrong because it is the most serious, irreversible act you can impose upon another human being. There is no possibility of restoring the loss or providing a genuinely equivalent compensation. It also is wrong because of the way it degrades the murderer. It places the murderer in the fellowship of Satan, degrading his or her humanity. We are either wracked with the pangs of guilt or our consciences are hardened and we become callous toward human life.

This command also reaches beyond conduct to our inner intentions and emotions. The apostle John wrote, "Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer." (I John 3:15) Jesus taught that anger and hate toward a brother put one in danger of hell fire. (Matthew 5:22) Again, we see God issuing a command that does not stop with the external act but goes on to challenge the attitude of the heart.

John Calvin says that all violence and injustice and every kind of harm to our neighbor is prohibited. He writes, "Accordingly, we are required faithfully to do what in us lies to defend the life of our neighbor, to promote whatever tends to his tranquility, to be vigilant in warding off harm, and when danger comes, to assist in removing it." (Institutes II.8.39)

³ <http://www.eskimo.com/~lhowell/bcp1662/baptism/catchism.html#TenCommandments>

Ethical Reasoning: Unit 7 - What is the Central Challenge of Christian Ethics?

The basis of this commandment is twofold. First, every human being is created in the image of God. (We noted this in Unit 2. People who don't share this view of human beings may easily convince themselves that torturing and killing another person is good.) We must not violate this reflection of God in every human being but must hold the person of every human being sacred.

Second, all people are bound together in the unity of the human race. Plotting to shed another's blood or seeking to do what jeopardizes another's safety is a blow against our common humanity and makes one guilty of breaking this commandment against murder. We are obligated to seek the safety and well-being of others if we are to obey the positive side of this command. (Even though most of the commandments are presented in a negative form, each has a positive message.) The positive thrust of this command is that, instead of murder or revenge, we are to love our neighbors, including our enemies, as we love ourselves.

All of the commandments concerning our relationship to other people are commands against diminishing or terminating their lives. We are to do exactly the opposite, or, in other words, to preserve and enhance the life of our neighbor as an expression of the respect they deserve and of the love we owe them. In this sense, commandments five through ten are commands against murder or against the reduction or ending of the life of another. They are at the same time commands to love all others and to increase the well-being of the lives of all others.

Therefore, this command has a very wide reach into our behavior. It pushes us in the direction of overcoming our own tendencies toward rage, anger and the violence that comes from these tendencies as well as toward active steps to end the conditions and circumstances that create the hurts, anger and despair that generate violence. It probes our willingness to reduce the means of violence (guns and military arms) used to inflict violence and death on others. It urges us to rethink our attitudes and actions towards all those we (or our group) define as "enemies."

We don't have time in this course to explore the ramifications of this command for our organizations. However, implications flowing from this command deal with care for Creation (not polluting the environment so that it is less life-supporting for future generations), product safety, the safety of working conditions, the priorities in the use of community resources for basic access to health care, the readiness to go to war and the tactics we use in war, the use of deadly force in controlling crowds, the provision of shelter and protection for battered women and children or the homeless, providing forums and means for conflict resolution, etc.

Think About It

Answer Box # 4

What do you think about Christians who justify participating in war? On what grounds might they do so, if ever?

Here is an example of a moral question on which Christians are divided. Some think they cannot justify war at all in light of Jesus' encouragement to his disciples to live in a non-violent manner. (Matthew 5:39) Others see the command to love the neighbor as mandating violent intervention when the neighbor is being murdered (as in cases of genocide of the Jews, the Armenians, the Rwandans, those in Darfur). For them, there needs to be a "just" cause that leads them to using "just" means to wage a "just" war. A few Christians have even argued for "preemptive" war, not waiting to wage a war defending one's own land and people, but striking first when there is overwhelming evidence of the evil intent of the other nation. For almost 2000 years, there has been more than one Christian position on war.

Augustine formulated the just war theory.

"War," he taught, "should be fought to secure justice and to reestablish peace. It must be conducted under the direction of the ruler and be characterized by an attitude of love for the enemy. Promises to the opposition should be honored, noncombatants respected, and there was to be no massacre, looting, and burning. Those engaged in God's service, including monks and priests, were not to take part in warfare."

"The early church, certain Christian humanists, and the majority of Anabaptists have taken a nonresistant or pacifist stance. The majority, however, have followed Augustine and claimed that certain wars are just. Denominations including the Church of the Brethren, Quakers, and Mennonites maintain a nonresistant position, but the larger groups such as Lutherans, Presbyterians,

Baptists, Roman Catholics, Methodists, and Reformed adhere to the just war interpretation.”⁴

Think About It

Answer Box # 5

How have you been a part of diminishing the life of another person in your family, at your place of work or among your acquaintances? Is there something you need to confess here? Is there a change in attitude and behavior needed here? Please write down some of your thoughts.

Seven: You shall not commit adultery.

The first of these last five commands is the most basic—life is the prerequisite for all other human activity. This command is the second most basic. It focuses on our closest, covenanted or committed relationships, symbolized above all else by marriage. If life is sacred, then this command builds a protective wall around the only relationship that has the power to bring life into being. Indeed, we can see that the fourth, fifth and sixth commands all have to do with the family: parents, life and then marriage and sexuality. Adultery threatens the bond of father and mother which brings life into being and nurtures it to adulthood. These fit together as mutually reinforcing commands.

Marriage was instituted by God and represents a covenant within which a man and woman may live together under God's blessing. Adultery breaks the vows of faithfulness contained in the marriage covenant. A life of singleness and celibacy is a legitimate option for those capable of maintaining their sexual purity. This is not a command that all are to marry or that the married state is better than the single state. It is about the most serious threat to the bond that marriage creates.

We should note that the original command in its context is very specific. This meant that a man, married or single, was prohibited from having sex with an engaged or married woman. In Israel, the law stated that if a man had sexual intercourse with an unengaged, unmarried woman, he was then to marry her. Therefore, the sixth command was not a license for men to have irresponsible sex with the unmarried (since it was “only” fornication, not adultery). Such sex required marriage. (Exodus 22:16)

This command concerns the sort of conduct that breaks the marriage. This includes anything that violates, pollutes or severs the covenant between a husband and wife. Proven adultery (*na'af*) along with prostitution and bestiality (and even fornication) could be punished with death. (Genesis 38:24; Leviticus 20:10; 21:9; Numbers 5:11-31; Deuteronomy 22:22; Ezekiel 23:45) Proverbs warns the young man repeatedly against the prostitute and is uncompromising about adultery. “But a man who commits adultery has no sense; whoever does so destroys himself.” (Proverbs 6:32) The Bible is consistent from beginning to end that this conduct mars and can destroy the marriage relationship.

It is wrong because it is a sin not just against the marriage, our own bodies but also against God. When David confesses his sin of adultery and murder, he confesses that his sin is against God. (Psalm 51:4) Marriage is not simply a culturally created convention, enacted in a variety of ways in different cultures. In all its forms, it bears witness to the reality of a man and woman becoming one flesh and bearing the image of God in that bonded relationship. Marriage is an image of the relationship of God and his people, Israel and the Church.

Adultery is wrong because it wounds our humanity. Marriage is the crucible within which we learn to die to ourselves and live for the good of another at the deepest levels. Adultery assaults others by betraying the spouse and often destroys family and wreaks havoc on children. The commitment not to have sex with another is the ground of freedom. It is part of an exclusive and unique relationship that images the sort of commitment we have with God. When people know they are treated with this dignity and honor, trust and security surround all the struggles that marriage naturally brings. There is no freedom in relationship unless there is fidelity and love.

Like the behavior required in other commandments, sexual purity (refusing the temptation to adultery and fornication) is grounded in purity of heart and mind. Jesus was very explicit about this when he referred to this commandment. “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery;’ but I

⁴ : <http://www.scribd.com/doc/14293129/Doctrine-of-War> (under #20-Augustine- #64 and #65—second quote)
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say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matthew 5:27-28)

Calvin concludes his commentary on adultery by writing, "If you aspire to obedience, let not your heart burn within with evil concupiscence [lust], your eyes wanton after corrupting objects, nor your body be decked for allurements; let neither your tongue by filthy speeches, nor your appetite by intemperance, entice the mind to corresponding thoughts." (Institutes, II.8.44)

Our contemporary world is in deep trouble in this arena. A healthy sexuality is made extremely difficult by the sexualization of life. Through advertisements, movies, literature and popular culture, we are bombarded with messages about sex as a highest good and a right for all. Propaganda tells us genital sexuality is our right, our natural instinct. A good and fulfilling life includes sex with as many people and as often as possible, where it is not coerced but mutually consensual. We have been pushed into the mold of isolated narcissists, seeking our own pleasure by internet pornography and all the partners we find attractive.

This command is not simply about saying no to adultery or other forms of sexual conduct that violate the intent of God in making us male and female, male or female. It is a command to embrace positive sexuality. We are not simply to avoid bad relationships and find disciplines that control our bodies, tongues and minds. We are to develop strong, life-affirming, committed partnerships in life. Within marriage we have the marvelous words of the Song of Songs, declaring erotic love to be a wondrous gift of God.

We are to regard our neighbor (and their wife or husband) as our brother and sister in Christ. We form relationships with them that help them to keep covenant as well. If we are married, we learn to express our sexuality in fidelity and love with our spouse and no other. This is a relationship of exclusivity and uniqueness. David Gill summarizes this command as follows:

Never act, think, or communicate in any way, sexual or otherwise, that violates or threatens covenanted, committed relationships. Rather, regarding such relationships as God's creation, do whatever you can to support fidelity, loyalty and commitment.⁵

In short, we should not do in our minds what we do not wish to do in our actions. The adulterous thought possesses the potential to lead to the act. Both are forms of disobedience to God's commandment. Here we are challenged with what we might call "the ethics of the mind." Are we obeying God in our minds and hearts? One of the consequences we reap today by violating this commandment is the spread of the terrible AIDS epidemic.

We must remember the mercy and kindness of God in all this. Adultery has the potential to destroy marriage, but it does not do so in many cases. Owning up to responsibility and forgiveness are deep medicines for this deep hurt. It is instructive that even though death was the prescription for murder and adultery, it was not imposed on King David. Also, Jesus did not reach for that solution for the woman caught in adultery. (John 8:1-11) Our sexual sins are part of the mess we have made with our lives that grace and sanctification clean up.

Think About It

Answer Box # 6

Today we have a new avenue of assault on our fight to be sexually pure, the internet. Is it wrong to view a little pornography? How would you explain the issues involved with such sexuality? What would you say a Christian who is caught in this addictive sort of behavior should do?

Internet pornography is an example of a new form of a very old temptation, to indulge in sexual lust. It can be discouraging to find out how many Christians have become addicted to this distortion of sexuality. Discovering God's will for us on this issue is not very difficult. Actually obeying God at this point is the harder part. In this area of temptation, some of us may need outside help. Let's look at one way that such help might be found. (See also Appendix A of this unit that gives more details on this issue).

A Christian friend of mine who struggled with this problem started a men's group called "Christian Organization of Men Pursuing Accountability for Sexual Self-Control" (COMPASS). Its purpose is "to encourage one another to follow God's standard for sexual purity. We do this by reminding one another of

⁵ Ibid., p. 233.

the Bible's teachings on healthy sexuality, being available for one another as a supportive team of brothers, holding one another accountable, and providing a safe, confidential place to share. This is a meeting to model and experience both the grace and truth of Jesus Christ."

Parts of a text that they read at every meeting are as follows:

Sexual Self-control – *We speak of maintaining our sexual purity by referring to it as "sexual self-control" or "sexual sobriety." Any sexual activity that leads to or involves any form of sex with one's self or partners other than our wife constitutes a break in our sexual sobriety.*

Jesus said, "You have heard that the law of Moses says, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust in his eye has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (NLT Matthew 5:27-28)

St. Paul said, "But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people." (NIV Ephesians 5:3)

These two passages from the Bible set the standard for our sexual self-control. They establish a principle we sometimes refer to as "zero tolerance."

Rejecting Lust – *We believe that lust, a form of idolatry, places ourselves ahead of God, and is a direct violation of his command. Therefore, eliminating lust from our thoughts and behavior is essential to living a life pleasing to God and produces inner joy and peace. Furthermore, it is only with God's help and through the progressive victory over lust that we are able to grow in Christ-likeness, maintain a healthy sexuality and keep from acting out our evil impulses.*

Think About It

Answer Box # 7

Write down any ways that you have found to be helpful in protecting you from breaking this commandment in your mind and in your actions.

Eight: You shall not steal.

"Stuff" is required to sustain life, health and committed relationships. This is the third command in this set of circles of conditions for a healthy and flourishing human life. Stuff means enough materials goods (food, clothing, shelter, tools) so that life can be lived in a dignified manner. The Old Testament ethical paradigm of the family includes land because it was the basic condition for securing the "stuff" needed for sustaining life and participating in the common life of Israel. The law of Jubilee was meant to recycle property back to original owners so that no family was permanently without land or property.

One might think about these commands as Martin Luther did; they progress from what is humanly dearest (life) to the next dearest (our spouse) to the third dearest (our property).⁶ One can also think of these as material things which make possible an ongoing marriage out of which new life is created and protected. To fraudulently remove the property of another is to stealthily remove the goods necessary for another's life and well-being.

Some scholars argue that this command originally covered kidnapping. Kidnapping is a heinous act, and Israel provided the death penalty for such conduct. However, it is clear that this command goes beyond this type of stealing to property theft (where Israel prescribed penalties less than death—restoration of the original property in multiples of what was stolen—and a convicted thief who could not restore the property and pay the additional fine was sold into slavery to pay the debt).

This conduct is wrong because it is an attack on our neighbor's well-being. Just the threat of it reduces their freedom and generates anxiety. My neighbors have a right to property because it is needed to sustain their life and the lives of their family. When they know it is secure, that I will not take it when they are not looking, they do not need to be vigilant and devote time and energy to securing their goods.

⁶ Cited in David Gill, *Doing Right*, p. 251 (Luther, *The Large Catechism* (Fortress Press, 1959) p. 39).
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Theft also imposes a burden on more than those from whom property is stolen. Every one of us pays higher prices in the market to make up for the loss of stolen goods. We must pay insurance premiums that are higher because insurers must pay out claims for stolen property. All of us must buy locks for our houses and security fences for our property (and even hire night guards).

The thief demonstrates a degraded humanity in the act of stealing. It shows them to be enslaved to the objects they steal. It is an indication that, for some reason, they are not able to compete, survive or win in the struggle for the goods of life (though some steal well beyond a simple desire or need for some simple good—think of the \$50 billion Ponzi scheme of the extraordinarily wealthy Bernard Madoff⁷). Then they must live a lie, covering their tracks and worrying that someone might discover their deeds. Either they live in shame and guilt or they harden their hearts and consciences and become callous.

The path to disobeying this commandment begins with longing for that which belongs to others. To obtain the goods, money or ideas of our neighbors through deception or injury to them in any way is to be guilty of theft, but violation of this commandment extends to every kind of right that we take away from our neighbors to their detriment.

Failure to perform our duty to others is also a form of theft. An employee may defraud his employer through waste, neglect, using paid time for personal business or the divulging of his secrets. An employer may mistreat an employee or withhold what is his in a variety of ways. Such failures to give what is owed to others may result from the inaction of almost anyone—rulers, pastors, church members, parents, children, the aged, teachers, students and every person who has responsibilities to others.

We can steal by remaining silent when the bill we are given mistakenly charges us too little, by failing to report all our income and pay taxes on it, by taking office supplies for personal use, by unauthorized use of computers and phones at work, by overcharging customers and providing them with poor service or products, by underpaying our employees and by presenting someone else's ideas as our own without proper credit due to them. There are many forms in which this command can be violated.

Calvin suggests that God desires the opposite behavior.

Let it be our constant aim faithfully to lend our counsel and aid to all so as to assist them in retaining their property. (...) Let us contribute to the relief of those whom we see under the pressure of difficulties, assisting their want out of our abundance. Let each of us consider how far he is bound in duty to others, and in good faith pay what we owe. (Institutes, II.8.46)

The positive side of this command is stewardship. It is rooted in the recognition that everything in Creation belongs to its rightful owner, God. Our business is to act as stewards within God's Kingdom of Creation. We are to care for the goods of this marvelous world in such a way that our use of them is an expression of our love of God and love of neighbor. Becoming healthy in our economic life means making choices that enable us to be content with what God provides for us and generous in sharing with others.

The Old Testament ethical paradigm of family includes "hospitality" as one of its basic values. It keeps land and property from being simply an inward, family status and privileged matter. Property is "ours" not "mine." Because its owner is God and we hold it only "in trust," we are to use it not only for the good of our family but the larger human community.

What we owe to different people may include respect, honor and obedience as well as paying financial obligations in timely ways. We may break the commandment against stealing by simply doing nothing when we ought to be doing something.

Think About It

Answer Box # 8

1. What is bribery? How is bribery related to the eighth commandment? Is it really wrong?
2. What conditions encourage the widespread resort to asking for bribes? Is "theft" a part of the way government and other services set up and pay (or don't) wages? Is asking for bribes just a matter of greed?

⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bernard_Madoff

Bribery is giving a gift or promise of a gift, either tangible or intangible, to another person to get him to provide some improper favor. (Section on "Justice" in the "Nigeria Covenant."⁸)

How many different kinds of bribery have you seen in the past year? This is a way of life for many people and acceptable in many societies, even if formally illegal. The pressure to participate in this type of corruption can be enormous.

The giving and receiving of bribes is a form of injustice according to the Scriptures. Moses prohibited it (Exodus 23:8; Deuteronomy 16:19), the prophets denounced it (Isaiah 1:23; Amos 5:12; Micah 3:11; 7:3), and God will not receive a bribe (Deuteronomy 10:17). The man who is approved by God does not take bribes (Psalm 15:5; Proverbs 15:27; Isaiah 33:15). However, the wicked man does accept a bribe (Psalm 26:10; Proverbs 17:23). Bribery is a vice that corrupts the mind (Ecclesiastes 7:7) and perverts justice (I Samuel 8:3). It is a form of stealing and violates the eighth commandment.

Think About It

Answer Box # 9

1. Is it possible for Christians in your society to resist the temptation to give or receive bribes of one kind or another? How?
2. Reread the comments above on the eighth commandment and note any ways mentioned that would make you feel guilty of theft. Can you think of other types of theft not mentioned here?
3. What temptations to steal as a leader or manager in a Christian organization or church do you often face?

Nine: You shall not bear false witness.

Immediately after our duty to protect the property of our neighbor comes the command to protect our neighbor's reputation. Martin Luther says it this way: "Besides our own body, our wife or husband, and our temporal property, we have one more treasure which is indispensable to us, namely, our honor and good name, for it is intolerable to live among men in public disgrace and contempt." (*Larger Catechism*, p. 43) We can harm our neighbor not simply by threatening or shortening his life, breaking into the covenant of marriage by adultery, or stealing the goods needed for life to flourish. We can harm neighbors by creating or passing on falsehoods about them.

This command is also related to the three commands that come before it. It requires that we speak clearly and truthfully in court when another is accused of murder, adultery or stealing. False testimony could itself be the cause of murder if someone is convicted of a capital crime and executed largely on false testimony.

Because our God is the God of truth, the One who sees and judges truly, the One who desires truth in his people, we must strive for truth in our relationships with one another. There are two major ways in which speaking falsehood can injure our neighbor. Untruths can rob someone of his or her good name and reputation. In a court of law or even in private conversation untruths can also rob a person of legitimate privileges and possessions. "A good name is to be more desired than great wealth." (Proverbs 22:1) To rob someone of his or her good name is to injure someone no less than to rob that person of his or her material goods.

Willingness to pass on or listen to slander (misrepresentation and false statements) and gossip (habitually revealing personal or sensational facts or rumors) is forbidden by this commandment as is the creation of untruths in our minds and hearts as well as the desire to hear them. Our responsibility is to be as truthful as possible in order to promote the good name and prosperity of our neighbor. Calvin wrote,

⁸ See Unit 13, p. 297.

"He [God] who forbids us to defame our neighbor's reputation by falsehood, desires us to keep it untarnished in so far as truth will permit. ... As just interpreters of the words and actions of other men, let us candidly maintain the honor due to them by our judgment, our ear, and our tongue." (Institutes, II.8.48)

Scripture is full of condemnation of a variety of ways deception and falsehood creeps into our relationships. On the positive side, it praises the tongue that speaks the truth and the life that lives the truth. Falsehood is wrong because it harms our neighbor, taking away his reputation and freedom. It harms the liar because it brings us into a condition where we must continue to lie to cover up past lies. Most seriously, it aligns us with Satan who was a liar from the very beginning and called the father of lies.

Our contemporary world is awash in falsehood. Advertising shades the truth and promises things it cannot deliver. Students cheat on exams and papers. They live the pretense that they are better than they are. Faculty members give out undeserved grades to avoid dealing with difficult students. Job seekers lie on resumes, adding accomplishments and credentials they do not possess. Politicians make promises they have no intention of keeping in order to secure votes. Yellow journalism, biased and sensational opinion masquerading as objective reporting; journalism with little careful research that exploits, distorts or exaggerates in order to attract more readers, panders to the public's desire to be told salacious tales about celebrities, making up stories to sell newspapers. The internet is rife with fraudulent invitations and confidence schemes to mislead and take money from the unsuspecting. Identity theft is the latest way of lying in order to plunder the assets of another.

This arena involves us in some of the most difficult and complex questions. Is it right for the state to lie and deceive in matters of national security? Can I as a citizen lie if my lie protects innocent life (as Rahab did in Joshua 2)? What about the social "white lies" when we complement others without really "meaning" it? Is this just a matter of social etiquette that everyone knows is not a serious swearing to the truth ("I swear to you, auntie, your outfit is the most beautiful I have ever seen")?

We are not seeking to solve these sorts of issues here. It is clear that the whole current of Scripture is on the side of truth-telling. It is also the case that there are people who do not have a right to the truth (so corporate secrets, privileged information about personnel, the key strategic plans of my organization may not be openly shared). Truth-telling always happens in a relationship within a larger social reality. Wisdom in what and how to speak and live the truth is always required. Sometimes silence is the best policy. Sometimes silence is a way of doing great harm to your neighbor by not speaking up when it would be unpopular or dangerous to do so.

Think About It

Answer Box # 10

Have you ever been hurt by the untruthful words that someone spoke about you to others? How did you feel? What did you do about it? Did you find it easy to forgive?

The prayer of the Chadian catechism regarding this commandment is as follows: "O God,...Enable us to respect you and to love you enough to not betray our neighbor, to not speak evil of him or to speak untruthfully about him. Help us instead to defend him, to speak well of him and to regard his conduct lovingly."

Some years ago my wife suffered terribly because of untrue things that a man said publicly about me, her husband. She prayed every day for months that God would help her to forgive this man. Several years later she met this man again. After their meeting she realized that, in spite of the evil he had done and the pain she had suffered, in her heart she was able to wish him well. God had enabled her finally to forgive him for his slander.

Think About It

Answer Box # 11

1. Part of how we treat people is how we speak about them. What have you said or listened to recently that is destructive of another person?
2. Write down some ways you and your colleagues could obey this commandment more fully.

Ten: You shall not covet.

This last command reaches beyond what people do (murder, adultery, theft) or say (false testimony) to their inner attitudes. Christian ethics deals not just with conduct but with the inner desires, motives and character of the person. While the other commands do not exclude the inner life, they do not focus on it. Jesus made it clear that the intent of even those commands was inward as well and not just focused on outward conduct and communication.

Of the six commandments that outline the duties that we owe our neighbor, this tenth commandment focuses most directly on the state of the mind and heart. Here is forbidden any desire for something that tends to our neighbor's loss. Covetousness is a yearning for something that belongs to someone else. The mention of wife, servants, ox, donkey or other things that belong to the neighbor is meant to indicate instances of what is meant. Covetousness is not a matter of simply admiring what another has. Admiration and honoring what is valuable, skillful, wondrous and beautiful that is possessed by another is a natural response. Covetousness is a driving force that generates schemes and steps to secure them for ourselves as well (and perhaps even to take them away from the other person).

This is at the heart of the sin in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were gloriously free to eat and tend all the trees in the garden, hundreds of them. There was only one tree they were not allowed to touch, but the serpent's lies roused covetousness, and the humans saw the tree held forbidden fruit that was "desired to make one wise." (Genesis 3:6)

Desire is what draws us forward toward the gifts God has put into Creation. It energizes our drive toward accomplishments and excellence. It draws us into relationships, yet desire needs to be disciplined and directed in the proper channels. When it becomes obsession and jealousy, it turns toward idolatry and covetousness. It moves sexual passion into sexual lust. It turns the delight in art and beauty into aestheticism. Rather than enjoy the meals set in front of us, we lust after the best food; we become gourmards⁹.

Covetousness is rooted in our lack of self-acceptance or gratitude for the gifts God has given to us. We compare ourselves unfavorably with others. We deceive ourselves by thinking, "If only I had this or that, if only I could perform at this or that level, if only I were promoted to that position, then my life would be complete." Our minds become preoccupied with what we don't have rather than with gratitude for what we do have. We become restless and discontent. We begin to play God by concluding that God's gifts to us are insufficient and we need to secure a better house, a smarter and more scintillating spouse, a newer and larger automobile, a more prestigious position, etc.

Instead, our hearts are to be preoccupied with that which is to the good and advantage of our neighbor. Not only are we to be grateful for what we have and are, but we are also to cultivate a positive appreciation for the gifts and accomplishments God has given to others. In this commandment God forbids God's people not only from the choices and actions of hatred, murder, adultery, theft and falsehood but also from entertaining thoughts in these directions. In brief, God desires pure, loving hearts that do not permit themselves to cultivate thoughts contrary to the law of love.

Calvin concludes, "The sum of the whole commandment, therefore, is, that whatever each individual possesses remain entire and secure, not only from injury, or the wish to injure, but also from the slightest feeling of covetousness which can spring up in the mind." (Institutes, II.8.50)

Think about it

Answer Box # 12

It seems clear that the tenth commandment goes to the root of all of our attitudes and behavior. What is the state of your deepest heart? Where is it focused? What does it desire most?

The biggest ethical battles of all are won or lost in our hearts. It is with good reason that Proverbs 4:23 offers ancient wisdom: "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." All the expressions of God's will in the Bible cannot help us if our heart's greatest desire is centered on

⁹ "a person who enjoys eating and often eats too much"
http://oxforddictionaries.com/view/entry/m_en_us1251670#m_en_us1251670
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ourselves. We will surely live a life of covetousness. Such impurity of heart does not enable us to see God (Matthew 5:8), nor help us to do God's will.

For those who want to please God, the catechism in the Anglican Book of Common Prayer nicely summarizes the way these last six commandments direct us to treat others:

My duty towards my neighbor is to love him as myself, and to do to all men as I would they should do unto me; To love, honor and aid my father and mother; To submit myself to all my governors, teachers, spiritual pastors and masters; To hurt no one by word or deed; To be true and just in all my dealings; To bear no malice nor hatred in my heart; To keep my hands from picking and stealing, and my tongue from evil-speaking, lying, and slandering; To keep my body in temperance, soberness, and chastity; Not to covet nor desire other men's goods, but to learn and labor truly to get my own living and to do my duty in that state of life unto which it shall please God to call me.¹⁰

Think About It

Answer Box # 13

Are there people in your life, church or organization who seem to be better off than you are, and you find yourself struggling with envy? Do you wish you had what they have and even to take some of it away from them? What is God asking you to do through this tenth commandment to defend your mind and heart against attacks of jealousy? Please write down your thoughts.

III. Concluding remarks on the Ten Commandments

If you have not done the reflections on these six commandments, please stop here and go back to do them now. If you have completed them, you will begin to realize the power of taking these ethical words of God seriously, perhaps in a new and deeper way than ever before. Consider memorizing these commandments and using them as regular tests of the ethical state of your heart and actions.

The Ten Commandments shape our expressions of love.

In keeping these commandments, a person is exhibiting the image of God, for they reflect God's character. Love to God, which flows out in love to neighbor, is the heart of God's moral will for God's people. As we have just seen, these commandments specify how that looks in daily life. In keeping God's commandments out of gratitude and love for God, we begin to fulfill God's moral purpose for us, and we find meaning in our lives.

Non-Christian worldviews challenge some of these commandments.

Perhaps our greatest obstacle to taking these commandments seriously is the fact that, instead of being preoccupied with loving God and neighbor, we are more focused on the excessive love of ourselves. We are seldom prepared to do good for our neighbor with the same passion that we do good for ourselves. Western secular worldviews put self at the center of life. Many traditional cultures put the family, clan and tribe at the center of life. None of these worldviews is concerned first with God and with neighbor as Jesus defined neighbor. The most remote stranger is included in Jesus' notion of neighbor as the parable of the Samaritan shows. (Luke 10:29-36) In this parable the action of the despised Samaritan was to be considered an example to follow. Jesus told the Jewish teacher of the law, "Go and do the same."

In short, every individual in the whole human race is our neighbor, worthy or unworthy, friend or foe. It is no wonder that we have trouble living a morality that reflects God's commands. We have all grown up in societies with worldviews and values that conflict with this Christian worldview and its universal command to love.

These commandments lead us toward honor in God's Kingdom.

Loving one's enemies (Matthew 5:44-45); refraining from vengeance (Leviticus 19:18); treating every person as a neighbor; loving God with all our heart, soul and strength—who can do these things? This calls for commitment and sacrifice. This requires the grace and strength of God as well. Yet, it is to

¹⁰ <http://www.eskimo.com/~lhowell/bcp1662/baptism/catchism.html#TenCommandments>

this kind of life that God calls us all. Jesus said, "Whoever annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:19)

Think About It

Answer Box # 14

The Apostle Paul wrote, "He who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law." (Romans 13:8) Our self-centeredness often prevents us from giving others their due. Will I try to use other people as instruments to serve myself and my interests, or will I receive them as those equal to me in dignity and worth and contribute to their well-being? How do I treat other people? In my thoughts, my words, my actions, do I treat every other person as though I were seeing in that person Jesus himself? See Matthew 25:37-40 as a basis for treating others in the way that we would want to treat Jesus. *Do you consciously do this with others? Please comment.*

Models: Abraham

Now let's look at one of the most well known characters of the Old Testament. Like us, Abraham wasn't always a perfect model, but he also faced an incredibly difficult ethical conflict. Hebrews 11 recognizes the importance of his positive example for us all.

Whom do you love most? (Genesis 22:1-18; Hebrews 11:8-19)

Bible reading: Read the above biblical texts before continuing the module below.

The Old Testament ethical paradigm of family underscores life, land and hospitality as the three cornerstones of human well-being. Abraham left his own extended family when God called him to migrate to an unknown land. (Genesis 12:1) He was promised a land in which he could dwell, yet he risked his chances to possess the land by giving up his rights to the best of it to his relative, Lot. (Genesis 13) He then tramped up the side of a mountain, ready to sacrifice this child of old age and to destroy all hope of the promise of becoming a great nation in the land. (Genesis 22) Embodying familial values is not always easy or straightforward.

The story of Abraham's offering of Isaac is the most dramatic picture of his obedience to the voice of God. In Genesis 21, against all human odds, Isaac is born. The promised child has come at last. Abraham then listens to his wife's voice and does the terribly difficult thing of sending his firstborn son, Ishmael, away. In Genesis 22 he is now asked to sacrifice this promised child on the mount. Is he willing to love God with all his heart, mind and soul?

The story echoes with the question Satan poses about Job. "Does [Abraham] fear God for nothing? Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands..." (Job 1:9-10) Like Job, Abraham is unaware that this is a test. For Abraham (as for Job) the test was very real. He was torn between the oft-repeated promise to have descendants and the command that seemed to nullify the promise, between his love for this late-born, miraculous son and his love for God. Will he choose the giver or the gift? What lies in the deepest motivation of his service to God? Does he love God because of God's blessings only? Or, does he love God in an unqualified way?

Tests are never pleasant, yet God tests our faith by putting us in dilemmas. It is a means of revealing our obedience, producing the "fear" of the Lord that is essential to living well, allowing us to discover the authenticity and integrity of our commitment to doing the will of God in our lives. In this case Abraham "fears" the Lord. He displays in his conduct the proper responses of obedience and trust.

This story is part of a larger picture. Abraham treasures family yet must seemingly give up elements of the fullness of family life in order to cling to God's promise alone. His struggle is repeated in the story of Israel as well. Abraham's action on Mount Moriah foreshadows what every family is to do. Every Israelite father was expected to dedicate his firstborn son to the Lord and to redeem him by offering a sacrifice. This redemption reminded the family not only of Abraham's faith and priorities, but also of the Exodus where sacrificial blood saved the firstborn sons of Israel. We see Joseph and Mary doing this very thing in the Temple with Jesus, dedicating him to the Lord and redeeming him with a blood sacrifice. It is also the story of God, who sacrificed his unique Son in order to redeem us all.

Abraham was one of the great models of faith in the Old Testament. He learned to allow God to make all the key decisions about his future. He learned God's sufficiency to achieve all the promises God had made. Even when things seemed darkest and most troubling, Abraham trusted God's promises. The author of Hebrews gives several examples of faith and obedience from his life (Hebrews 11:8-19) and

Ethical Reasoning: Unit 7 - What is the Central Challenge of Christian Ethics?

James underscores Abraham's faith as well (James 2:20-24). An analysis of how Abraham lived is as follows:

- **His ethical challenge:** to give to God what he most wanted to keep for himself, his son.
- **His ethical action:** to prepare to sacrifice Isaac as God had commanded.
- **His temptation:** to put his own desire and understanding ahead of God's will.
- **The cost of his doing what was right:** the potential loss of his son.
- **The reward of his doing what was right:** God's approval of Abraham's faith and Abraham's becoming the father of all who are faithful to God.

Think About It

Answer Box # 15

1. Have you experienced a conflict between what you wanted and what God wanted? What did you do? How did you feel about your action? What might have happened if you had done the other thing?
2. Would you like to live differently in the future? If so, how?

Summary

The last six of the Ten Commandments give us basic instruction in living with our fellow humans. They urge us to honor our parents, cherish life, protect the exclusivity of our sexual relationships with our spouse, be content with what we have and not take from others what belongs to them, be truth tellers, and guard our heart against covetousness of what others have and are. These are pillars and foundations of the good life. Live in this way, and life will flourish as God wanted. Abraham was the model at whom we glanced. This man was ready, in faith and, by God's direction, to lay down his son's life, believing that God was powerful enough to bring life out of death. Abraham was a man who loved God more than anything else in Creation.

Unit 7 Final Assignment

Final Assignment

1. Write on one to two pages your thoughts about how the lives of people in your church or organization might change if they took very seriously the practical implications of the last six commandments that God gave to Moses as recorded in Exodus 20.
2. On another one to two pages write about the influence of the Decalogue on your own thinking. What commandments have special meaning for you? Why? What actions would you like to take as a result of reviewing the Ten Commandments and their importance for you as a Christian and as a leader? Include any thoughts you have about how to accomplish this.
3. Please confirm that you have discussed the results of your interactive work in Unit 7 ("Think About It" boxes) with a group of two other people.
4. Have you read Stott, pp. 325-387, "Women, Men and God; Marriage, Cohabitation and Divorce"? How well do you think Stott's arguments fit with what you have learned about sex and marriage in this unit? If Stott is right about these issues, what should that mean for you practically?

When your work is complete (three to five pages total), send a copy to your facilitator via email as an attachment. Please send it by the date indicated in the Module Calendar.

Appendix: Out of Control Sex and Pornography

One of the major issues of our day (even among Christian leaders) concerns the challenge of sexuality. The emotional anxiety of leading and seeking to succeed is often accompanied with loneliness and a feeling of loss of control. One of the behaviors in which leaders are trapped is sexual misconduct and compulsion.

Some of these issues are rooted in the tragedy and reality of childhood sexual abuse which sets a time bomb inside people that explodes as they grow into adulthood. Some of these issues are simply the rise of cybersex and the temptations and encouragements that saturate the media and the internet. Barriers and obstacles to sexual exploration have been obliterated overnight. There are more than one hundred thousand pornography websites, and more are being introduced daily.

All of these issues need to be confronted and brought out of the shadows, or it will fester and gradually rot the moral center of our being. Like gangrene that gradually kills a limb and then the person, sexual compulsions can destroy the career and community of the leader who is caught in this tragic web of sin.

Sexuality acts in the lives of those captured by pornography as Paul describes our relation to the power of sin—we are enslaved to its power (“the body ruled by sin,” Romans 6:6; “I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin,” Romans 7:14; cf. Romans 7:21-25). The addicted find sexual desires as unmanageable, as a compulsive drive that sweeps them into a current too strong for their will. We feel helpless and hopeless in our conduct. Consider a couple of case studies.

Case 1: Carrie, the Music Teacher¹¹

Carrie was a music teacher. She was known for boundless energy and creativity in music. She served four elementary schools, carrying heavy equipment from school to school in her old red Volkswagen bus. The kids loved her, and she loved them. Colleagues admired her skills. Parents were grateful and attended her concerts in masses.

Carrie had another life as well. Her singing was true and compelling. She received regular engagements at local nightspots. She dreamed of being a star. Her singing career, however, never got beyond the local piano bar circuit. No matter how hard she tried, her professional singing career was stymied. As she approached the age of thirty, her disappointment grew into panic that her dream might not happen.

Carrie’s sexual addiction started to flourish at the point when she began panicking about her career. In the beginning there were occasional one-night stands with hotel customers in bars in which she sang. Then it became every night she worked. The ritual started with her looking over the patrons, selecting the most interesting. Animated conversations during the breaks followed. After finishing, she would go to his room and have sex. Leaving at three or four in the morning, she would return home for a few hours of sleep before school started.

She did not like what she was doing. In the morning, looking at the trusting faces of the children, she would feel the profound incongruity of where she had been but a few hours before. Also, her teaching was slipping as the addiction progressed, though no one really noticed but her. The children were still excited and everyone she worked with was convinced she was great. Still, she knew. She even discovered that being at four different schools made it easier for her to cover when she overslept. She had simply “stopped at one of the other schools.”

Carrie had also ceased dating and started singing on weekends. Since she lived alone, her only human contacts were the children and her piano bar customers. What she really wanted was a husband and a family. As her addiction progressed, she began to believe no man would want to be with her if he knew about her life.

Think About It

Answer Box # 16

Carrie’s ethical issue is clear. Her behavior is out of control. Having slept with hundreds of men, she is fortunate not to have contracted HIV/AIDs. If she came to you as a counselor, what would you say and do to help her change this conduct?

¹¹ From Patrick Carnes, *Out of the Shadows: Understanding Sexual Addiction* 3rd edition (Center City, Minn: Hazelden, 2001), pp. 27-28.

Sexual addiction is a cycle that intensifies with each repetition:

1. *Preoccupation*: We find ourselves in a mood or even in a state of being that carries us with it. Every passerby, every relationship, every image on the television is passed through an internally obsessed filter. We “check out” people for how sexually attractive they are in a way that goes beyond what is appropriate appreciation for attractiveness. There is a quality of desperation that interferes with dealing with others, with our work and even with sleep. People become objects to be scrutinized as “possibilities.” Sometimes even when we are in church, listening to a long prayer, our thoughts drift away from God to some sexual fantasy.

We see the driving force of this sort of thing in the initial stages of courtship when a young couple is “intoxicated” with each other. They can’t get enough of each other and think about each other constantly. It is that intoxication and passion that the pornography viewer or the sexual addict seeks to recapture. There is a sort of total preoccupation where hours can pass as you’re gazing at pornographic images on the computer screen. Or, the risk and danger of the affair heightens the mood and buries the feelings of regret or remorse.

2. *Ritualization*: Studies indicate that those who are caught in the compulsive slavery of sexual addiction tend to follow the same pattern again and again. Like other rituals, the repetition enhances the mood and triggers it as a familiar path is followed. Sexual addicts often talk about their rituals: the compulsive masturbator, the incestuous father, the cybersex addict, the hustler looking for the one-night stand—all have regular routines that foster a sense of safety and excitement. These are ways of keeping the conduct hidden from significant others as well as guaranteeing the end result.
3. *Compulsive sexual behavior*: The first two phases of this cycle are often hidden. The sexual compulsion is kept as hidden as possible from family, friends and co-workers so as to present an image of normalcy and uprightness to the outside world. However, the sexual addict knows the incongruity of his or her double life.

Yet, this third phase leaves a trail that cannot be entirely erased. Those enslaved to this compulsion experience themselves as powerless over their behavior. They often have feelings of regret and sorrow, of self-condemnation and despair and will pick a day when they will stop this conduct forever. Yet, again and again they betray their resolutions and commitments because their compulsion overwhelms their intentions. It is an area of unmanageability.

4. *Despair*: This is the low point of the cycle. After engaging in compulsive sexual conduct they have a deep sense of failure and feel hopeless. If the conduct was particularly degrading or intrusive in disturbing other commitments, if it violates their deeply held values and beliefs, they will experience self-hatred as well. Some report suicidal feelings as well. At times they are also basking in a pool of self-pity, justifying what they are doing because of the difficult situation and people they have to deal with. However, always lurking in the shadows is the knowledge that these negative feelings can be assuaged with another cycle of exciting sex. The cycle repeats itself.

Case 2: Kevin’s Story¹²

Kevin is 37 years old, married with two children and an executive in a manufacturing company.

It is 3:30 A.M. and I’m still online. Pornographic images of women stream into my computer screen. Earlier tonight, after putting my two kids to bed, I watched the evening news with my wife, Jeneen. Since my wife was tired after a long day at work, she soon went to bed. Though I, too, was exhausted, primarily from too many late nights on the computer, I, as usual, told her I was still not tired and would stay up late and read for a while.

Once I was sure that Jeneen was asleep, I turned off the bedroom light, and headed for the den and the family computer. “OK, tonight I’m just going to stay online for an hour,” I promised myself. “It’ll be midnight when I’m done, and that’s enough time. I really just can’t stay up half the night again. Today at work I actually caught myself nodding off during Alan’s important sales plan presentation. I haven’t been able to really focus lately, either.”

Once I sat down, I arranged my chair and the screen so that if Jeneen should awaken and come in, I’d have a moment to switch the screen view over to a work-related document. I’m more careful now, since a few months ago my wife surprised me and saw the photo of a naked woman I was viewing.

I talked myself out of that embarrassing situation with the excuse that while trying to finish a work project, I’d opened an e-mail from one of my colleagues. In it was a link to a site that the guy had said I

¹² From Patrick Carnes, David Delmonico, and Elizabeth Griffen, *In the Shadows of the Net: Breaking Free of Compulsive Online Sexual Behavior*, 2nd edition (Center City, Minn: Halzeden, 2007), pp. 2-3.

would find interesting. It was a porn site, and I told my wife that I'd never seen anything like it and was just looking out of curiosity.

I remember only too well how I'd felt at that moment. Heart pounding in my chest. My mouth instantly parched. Feeling of fear, shock, embarrassment, and panic coursing through my body as, in those very, very long moments, I searched for a plausible explanation. I didn't ever want to go through that again. Besides, I knew there would be no good excuse if my wife caught me again.

I'd actually sworn off porn sites after that night. I deleted the bookmarks and told myself that it wasn't worth it. I realized that I loved my wife and children and didn't want to jeopardize these relationships over some nude photos.

That promise was broken in less than a week. After a particularly hard day at work, I told myself that I deserved a reward. I'd take just thirty minutes to masturbate, and then I'd go off to bed with Jeneen.

For several evenings, I kept to this thirty-minute ritual. Feeling more confident now with my control over my Internet usage, I decided to give myself an hour each evening. A few weeks passed, and before I knew it, I was online for hours on end again each evening—until two, three, even four o'clock in the morning. I just didn't know where the time was going. What felt like an hour just suddenly turned into three or four. I was searching for just the right woman, just the right look to masturbate to before going to bed. At times, I felt like this Internet thing was spiraling out of control.

I felt extreme anticipation and excitement when I first went online in the evening, the concentration and thrill increasing as I searched various Web sites and found new ones. But after I masturbated, I felt awful. I had so many harsh feelings and was angry for wasting so much time. I felt ashamed and guilty that I had done this again. And worst of all, I felt helpless and full of despair because I realized I didn't know how or when I would be able to stop. Exhausted and beaten down, I quietly slipped into bed, wondering how I was going to make it at work again on just three hours of sleep.

Think About It

Answer Box # 17

Kevin, along with millions of others, experiences the controlling power of this temptation and sin. Comment on what thoughts this case stirs up within you.

Where do we go from here? What do we do if we are being slowly imprisoned in this sort of compulsive conduct? What do we say to our spouse or friend when we discover that they are entangled and despairing? At times this is an issue so deep and so strong in a person's life that professional counseling is the best alternative.¹³ How do we practically help people think through this ethical issue and take real steps toward the life of freedom promised in Christ?

One of our colleagues, Jonathan Abraham from India, has written up a response to the issue of pornography. It follows a bit different approach than the RESOLVEDD method because it is more oriented toward doing something specific about an ethical issue already clarified than with clarifying the issue.

In this case, from a Christian perspective, the ethical issues of compromising one's integrity, entering a world of lust and deception, of betrayal and enslavement are relatively clear. Nevertheless, there are about 80 million searches on the Internet for pornography every day. Were you one of them? Do you find yourself, a close friend or spouse entangled? What steps can be taken to deal with this issue?

Jonathan's suggestions follow below.

¹³ The books cited in the two case studies are good resources for understanding more of this behavior and how to address the emotional and physical sides of it beyond the spiritual issue that is so clearly present.

Seven Steps of Moral Decision Making:

Step 1: Identify the moral problem.

Internet Pornography: a current moral issue that has only come about in the past several decades.

Step 2: Describe the nature of the problem or practice that is in question.

Sexual temptation has always been a struggle for God's people. Within the last two decades, however, the proliferation of easy-access internet pornography has made sexual sin an extremely easy endeavor. Whereas in previous generations one would have to make a deliberate effort to seek out sexual explicit material, now such activity, due largely to the internet, has increased in its accessibility, affordability and anonymity.

Statistics demonstrate that internet pornography is an increasing global problem in both society and the church. Because of its secretive and taboo nature, the Christian community often overlooks this issue. Yet, statistics show us that Christian leaders are especially susceptible to pornography.

Today, the online pornography industry makes several billion dollars annually, one of the largest internet markets. The industry spends millions of dollars a year marketing and promoting its products.

We know from statistics that:

- 60% of the entire internet relates to sex¹⁴
- Around 2/3 of Christian men in the Americas and Europe have sought out forms of pornography.¹⁵
- 37% of pastors in America say they struggle with an internet pornography addiction.¹⁶

Although these statistics are mostly Western, pornography is a global problem. While "sex" is the most frequently searched for search-engine phrase in the world, the majority of these searches come from South Asia¹⁷. The internet allows such forms of sin to become readily available through the click of a mouse. Christian leaders should respond vigilantly and watchfully to such temptation.

Step 3: Find biblical teachings and examples that shed light on the moral issue or practice in question.

The root cause of this sexual sin, internet pornography, lies in a faulty understanding of human identity. God created us in God's image, and our identity reflects God's moral and relational character. (Hebrews 3:14, Matthew 5:14) These principles are foundational to the Christian worldview. The Fall distorted human identity, and this identity crisis lies at the heart of our struggles over sexual purity. Pornography turns people into objects of lust rather than God's workmanship set apart for God. (1 Corinthians 12:27) Yet, God created us in God's image for a higher purpose. Although Peter only saw himself as a fisherman, Jesus pointed him to his higher identity: "You are Peter, the Rock." (Matthew 16:13-19)

Internet pornography takes sexual activity outside the God-ordained confines of marriage to the public arena, thus breaking holy boundaries. Outside these boundaries, God's originally intended shalom is forgone and sin ensues.

Step 4: Distinguish between the aspects of the issue that are in harmony with biblical teaching and those aspects that are in conflict with biblical teaching.

God created the human body and sex as good things with good purposes. In several places the Bible affirms that God calls us to celebrate healthy human sexuality. The whole book of Songs of Songs celebrates romantic and sexual love and marriage as sacred and beautiful. Proverbs 5:19 encourages the man to be "intoxicated" by his wife's love and physical beauty.

The arousal of lustful desires outside of a monogamous, God-ordained relationship biblically classifies as adultery. Jesus directly rebuked such actions saying, "but I tell you, that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully had already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matthew 5:28) Paul was also blunt in such regard: "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself?...Flee from sexual immorality. All sins a man commits outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own

¹⁴ MSNBC/Stanford/Duquesne Study, *The Washington Times*, 1/26/2000

¹⁵ See <http://www.provenmen.org/framework/index.php?page=need> accessed July 13, 2010 for statistics related to sexual addiction and pornography.

¹⁶ Christianity Today, 3/5/2001, p. 44-45.

¹⁷ Alexa Research Finds "Sex" popular on the Web..." Business Wire (02/14/2001).

body.”¹⁸ Thus, we should celebrate human sexuality when practiced according to its purpose and condemn its abuse. Pornography, because of its public forum, does not fall under the boundaries of a married relationship and hence qualifies as a form of adultery.

Step 5: Write down the position that you believe, or your group believes, represents the will of God for you regarding the moral issues in question.

We affirm that all forms of pornography and using the human body in a lustful manner outside of marriage are sinful. We hold this belief for the following reasons:

- Pornography in its essence turns both males and females into objects of gratuitous sexual pleasure which is outside of God’s agenda for human beings.
- Sexual gratification, outside the God-ordained confines of marriage, cannot be redeemed to glorify God because it is in direct violation of God’s good purposes for humankind. Such activity thus inhibits and impedes one’s relationship with God.

Step 6: Write down what you and your group are actually going to do about this issue.

Most places in the world, especially in the church, consider pornography a taboo topic. Turning the church into a safe place to discuss lust and sexual issues is important. The Christian community must continue to provide counseling and healing for those struggling with sexual addictions. 1 Corinthians 10:13 states, “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man.” We must allow for and take measures for our community to become more open on the struggles of pornography, a common struggle.

These are the actions we will take:

- If our churches do not already have support or accountability groups for such sexual sins, we will take the initiative to start them within the next year.
- We will also take the necessary measures in our own life to cut off anything that might tempt us towards forms of sexual sin, like trivial internet surfing, and all forms of sexual temptation within the media.

Step 7: Design a structure of accountability.

If we struggle with internet pornography, which several of us do, we will take the following measures:

- Share our problem with a close friend, associate, pastor or wife in the next few weeks.
- Honestly tell that person about our struggles, ask if they will act as an accountability partner and commit to meet on a regular basis.
- Give the accountability partner the freedom to ask hard questions.
- Radically amputate any area of our life that causes us to sin (“Throw of anything that hinders” - Hebrews 12:2) i.e. installing an internet filter on your computer, ban yourself from unedifying websites, cease watching risqué movies or TV programs.

If we do not currently struggle with internet pornography, we will take the following measure to avoid the temptation of such sin:

- Ask someone we know well to act as an accountability partner and openly discuss our spiritual weaknesses and sins with them.
- If pornography ever tempts us, we will openly tell our accountability partner about it so that such sin does not gain a foothold on our life.

Postscript: Several forms of pornography are prominent in the church today. If you struggle with pornography, we highly recommend you find an accountability partner with whom you can share this problem. We also recommend the following free online resources to help you deal with and fight against such sin:

<http://www.settingcaptivesfree.com/courses/way-of-purity/>

<http://xxxchurch.com/>

<http://www.everymansbattle.com/>

¹⁸ 1 Corinthians 6:15-20 (NIV)

Ethics for Living and Leading

Unit 8

How Do We Live Ethically In Our Relationships?



Development Associates International

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Unit 8 - How Do We Live Ethically In Our Relationships? (Loving others according to the pattern of Jesus)

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Learning Outcomes:

At the end of this unit you will be able to:

- State what Jesus meant by loving one's neighbor;
- Interpret the Sermon on the Mount as an ethical guideline for contemporary conduct;
- Evaluate your attitude and actions toward people you don't like;
- Consider how marriage and celibacy influence the way we think about and treat one another in the body of Christ;
- Analyze the ethical decisions of a biblical character.

Steps to Complete Unit 8

Read and Respond

Readings are included at the end of most units. These texts provide a biblical and cultural framework for an adequate understanding of Christian ethics. Please reflect and respond as indicated in assignments found within the texts.

Supplementary text: John R. W. Stott, Issues Facing Christians Today, 4th Edition (Zondervan 2006). For Unit 8, please read Stott, 135-188 (Caring for Creation; Living with Global Poverty)

Lecture Notes & Workbook

Overview

We are now nearly two-thirds finished with this course on “Ethics for Living and Leading.” We have already thought about many important issues. We have explored the central role of ethics in an authentic Christian life. We have reviewed the elements of a Christian worldview and have seen how essential it is as a framework for ethical thought and action. We noted the importance of making Christ-likeness the model for all of our attitudes and actions. The difficult challenges of ethical living are evident in the lives of the Old Testament characters we have examined. Yet, the presence of the Holy Spirit is among us and within us to strengthen us in ethical living.

We have seen in a fresh way how the Ten Commandments help us understand what it means to love God and neighbor. These powerful words reflect God’s nature and will for us. They are the beacons of truth that cast light on our path so that we know how to live and lead in ethical uprightness, in ways that honor God and accomplish God’s purposes.

In this unit we want to zero in on some ethical issues that require more detailed guidance than the greater breadth of the Ten Commandments is able to offer. Some people have argued that there is no formal Christian ethic presented in the New Testament, but that there are only Christians who are trying to live their lives in the light of the Gospel. They are trying to discern the will of God (Romans 12:2) as they exercise their liberty in Christ, their God-given intelligence, their knowledge of the Scriptures and their confidence in the guidance of the Holy Spirit. There is some truth in this sentiment, but it is one-sided and neglects all the concrete ethical guidance present in the New Testament. There is clearly much more to New Testament ethics than the sanctified intuition of followers of Christ.

We have seen that the Ten Commandments God gave to Moses are extremely important for us, but they are still very general (many are covering or area principles) and do not resolve all the moral and ethical problems we face today. Discernment will always be necessary to see clearly the path we should take in given situations. In Unit 4 we explored how we discern the will of God, practically speaking. However, resolve and courage will also be needed to actually follow the way that is often narrow but leads to life both now and later. (Matthew 7:13-14)

Christian ethics will always involve biblical interpretation as well as the interpretation of ourselves, of others, of society and of God as we seek to be faithful to Christ in our individual and communal behavior. As we let the Scriptures shed their light on our contemporary moral situation, we may begin to understand better the attitude of the heart in the life of Christ. The lives of the New Testament writers and their hearts will also help us to see more clearly and to live more decisively in a way that expresses the character and will of God.

How, then, can the New Testament help us to examine ourselves, to discern the will of God and to follow the path that leads to abundant life that pleases God? We propose to examine some New Testament passages in order to look at how the biblical authors understood the significance of Jesus and how they interpreted the ethical consequences of Jesus’ life and teaching for them and for the Christians of their day. Let us then see how this biblical light helps to make our own ethical decisions clearer. Because Jesus’ most compact statement of God’s moral will for God’s people was summed up in loving God and neighbor, let’s first dig deeper into what love really means at the most practical level possible and then take a new look at his teachings in the Sermon on the Mount.

We begin with a case study. Many of you work in or work closely with NGOs or not-for-profit companies. The center of their identity is often captured in Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan. They exist in order to provide significant help and uplift for those who are less privileged and exist at the margins of mainstream society. Their intentions are to provide an important service and resource for them. At times, dilemmas arise.

I. Case Study: Money for a Good Cause¹

In late spring 2001, Mike Saklar was appointed director of the Siena/Francis House, a 25-year-old community-based homeless shelter in Omaha, Nebraska (USA). Through many years of experience with homeless people, Saklar knew that, regardless of background or family, most shared one condition—most homeless people were addicted to alcohol or drugs. Combined with the freezing winters, a drugged or drunk and unsheltered homeless person could easily die in a short few hours. Siena/Francis house was a crucial, life-saving shelter.

Part of Saklar’s work in the past had been to help homeless people resist the aggressive presence of drugs and alcohol on the streets and to find detoxification and rehabilitation opportunities. He was helped in this new work at Siena/Francis house by the mission statement. It was first committed to “get our guests off the street” into the shelter home. Then it sought to “encourage sobriety in our recovery

¹ Based on a true story recited in Rushworth M. Kidder, *Moral Courage* (New York, Harper: 2005), pp. 87-89. Ethics For Living and Leadership, Version 3.0

program, a traditional 12-step recovery process” (Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous programs). Not surprisingly, Saklar was completely committed to keeping alcohol and drugs out of any shelter in which he worked.

Like many NGOs that were nonprofits, Siena/Francis house had to fight for its funding. Its best source of annual income was a well-supported and publicized “walk for the homeless” each spring. Through a long tradition of sponsorships, individual gifts and donations by walkers and their friends, Siena/Francis house received the majority of its annual budget from this one event.

By the time Saklar took over the leadership of Siena/Francis house, the plans were well-advanced for the 2002 “walk for the homeless.” The major corporate sponsor who provide over half the funding for this walk had signed up again. The various committees were busy mapping the route, ensuring security, and making public announcements.

Then came the terrible news—their corporate sponsor, a major company now in the state of Texas, but with its original home in Omaha, Nebraska, had canceled its sponsorship. The company’s name was Enron. It had collapsed.

With only weeks to go, the shelter’s Board met to consider next steps. Given the publicity of the collapse of Enron, a news story followed with particular interest in Omaha, and the Board knew there was no reversing that cancellation of sponsorship. Enron’s philanthropy had dried up overnight, leaving hundreds of previously sponsored nonprofit NGOs stranded without funding. It was not just he Siena/Francis house that was devastated.

Just as quickly as Enron vanished, a local company stepped up to take its place. It was a local distributor for a major national beer brewery. The board learned that the firm would be glad to sponsor the walk at the same level as Enron had done in the past. However, if this was like other beer sponsorships at national sporting and entertainment events, the Board suspected that the firm would want the name of its beer displayed prominently throughout the day.

What should the Board do? Some members saw this as a life-saving offer coming from a reputable corporation whose products were perfectly legal and widely used. Others argued that Siena/Francis house could not in good conscience use this occasion—a fundraiser whose purpose was to help homeless people move toward sobriety—to promote the very products that helped foster their addictions.

The first faction on the Board responded that beer, low in alcohol and usually not consumed in vast quantities, was hardly as dangerous as hard liquor or even wine, and that, in any case, even if it were, it was better to keep the shelter open and operating for all its guests rather than to shut it down because a few might be at risk from beer advertisements. What, they wondered, will we do for the staff employees that will have to be let go? This prompted a reply from the second group who pointed out the spectacle of shelter staff and Board members sporting beer logos on their T-shirts at the event. All of this, they said, flew in the face of all they stood for since the beginning of the shelter, and it would be better to close the shelter temporarily until a better sponsor could be found than to compromise on such a deeply held principle.

Think About It

Answer Box #

1. What do you think is the chief ethical issue facing this NGO?
2. In thinking about the two alternatives solutions that face this organization, which would you advocate and why? Or, do you think there is a better third option?

As we have learned so often, the complexity of the real world often overwhelms our simple models for ethics. Our choices are not always right against wrong, but the lesser of two evils or one right pitted against another right thing to do. For Siena/Francis the road forward was suddenly more difficult and challenging when its major donor/sponsor went bankrupt and funds dried up. It is in such crisis times that the wisdom and maturity of an organization and its leadership are tested. Then you discover how ethically fit they are.

In our own journey in ethics, we now explore the ethical principles and perspective Jesus offers in his words and example. We will once again encounter imperatives at three levels—covering principles, area principles and specific rules. We will need to use care as we read Jesus’ words in light of the ethical and moral challenges that face us today.

II. How to love according to Jesus (Luke 10:25-37)

Bible Reading: Read the above biblical text before continuing the reading of the text below.

Love is a central theme of the Gospel of Luke. Love is also at the heart of God's nature. As the Apostle John wrote, "God is love." (1 John 4:16) Love for God and human beings summarizes the essence of Christian morality. Throughout Luke's Gospel we see examples of Jesus' love for the sick, for people injured by life and for the marginalized. His conduct also reflects God's love, justice and mercy for all people. This divine example calls us to human relations based on love, justice and mercy.

How can we describe love? It is not simply a feeling or a sentiment. Instead, it's taking seriously the ties that link us to other human beings and that make us responsible to them. Perhaps the most important text for Christian ethics in Luke's Gospel is the parable of the Good Samaritan. (10:25-37) It can help us understand what Jesus meant by love.

- In verse 33 we see that when the Samaritan saw the wounded man, "he took pity on him." In other words, he let the distress of someone in need move his heart. Here is a feeling component. His heart was not hardened.
- In verse 34 we see that the Samaritan took another step. He acted thoughtfully and concretely by coming to the man's aid and arranging for the care he needed. Here we find thoughtfulness and discernment. He did not simply act out of emotion.
- In verse 35 we see the Samaritan leaving the victim without making him feel that he, the benefactor, even needed to be thanked. In this way he showed himself to be a neighbor to the man in distress. Here is practical wisdom.

The expert in the law had asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29) Jesus reply shows that this lawyer was asking the wrong question. Jesus said to him at the end of the parable, "Go and do likewise." (10:37) In other words, Jesus was asking the lawyer to focus on being a neighbor rather than on asking who his neighbor was. Jesus' parable had already answered the lawyer's question about who his neighbor was. Everyone was to be considered as his neighbor, even his despised enemy. What counts as love in Jesus' sight is not asking who my neighbor is, but on being a neighbor to all.

How one loves his or her neighbor, the person in need, whomever that may be, is what the Samaritan illustrated in this story. The Samaritan had to be discerning and creative in deciding how to express love, and it cost him something to do it. This is a great example of practical love, of love in action toward a traditional enemy. Jesus lifted up this man's action as an example to follow.

Think About It

Answer Box # 2

1. Who are people in your life who have been a neighbor to you? They probably didn't ask for your thanks. Have you ever thanked them?
2. Who are people in distress in your life for whom you would rather not be a neighbor? Is Jesus' asking you to change your attitude toward them in some way? How?

Love is a "covering principle" in the sense that whatever road on which we find ourselves (on the way to Jericho or Bangkok or Kampala or Chennai etc.), we are to act the role of neighbor. We are to reach out in appropriate and sacrificial ways that express the love of Christ for the people of our generation. What does that love mean, and what does justice require? Under what circumstances?

Should the Samaritan have organized a "neighborhood" militia to patrol the Jericho road and prevent such victimizing of travelers? Was this a problem the government should have handled long ago? Is binding up the wounds of one victim enough as an expression of love? What should the priest and Levite have done? Preach some sermons on justice? Write some songs to sing that would mobilize the compassion of Israelites? What else does love motivate?

There are so many options not developed in this short parable. All we know is that we are to fulfill the duties of loving our neighbor in tangible and practical ways, but that means fleshing out the details in terms of who we are, determining our context and realizing what our resources might be to address the needs of the many. Some of that is done for us as Jesus gives us a larger framework for thinking clearly about our ethical faithfulness as light and salt in our world.

III. Ethics for Christ-Followers

From a biblical worldview, it is clear that the primary, foundational authority for Christian ethics is Jesus Christ. Christian ethics is Christ-centered because we affirm Christ as Lord, Savior and God. The mandates, commands, instructions and power for living he offers are central to Christian ethics because

the narrative of Scripture makes Christ central and points to him as the definitive revelation of the will and word of God. While Christian ethics learns from many other sources of wisdom about human living, it filters all other counsel and guidance through the wisdom of Jesus Christ. He is the living Word of God, and, therefore, we listen to his voice.

The first question to answer is not “what shall we do?” but “*to whom do we belong?*” Even in the Ten Commandments, the first statement focused not on the duties of Israel but the identity of the God to whom they belonged. Israel belonged to Yahweh, the God who freed them from slavery. If we answer the question of who is Lord, then we will be able to answer the question of what we must do as servants of that Lord. If we are clear on our identity, our behavior will necessarily be guided by who we are. There are many voices and authorities that seek to define our identity apart from our allegiance to Jesus Christ. As we shall see, the choice we make in terms of our identity governs virtually everything else. Our character and our conduct are integrally related to each other.

The substance of Christian ethics is often expressed as “Christ-likeness.” Likeness to Christ is mentioned repeatedly in the New Testament as the moral and spiritual goal toward which God is leading us. In one sense (as the Christian ethicist Paul Lehmann phrased it), the goal is maturity not morality.² That is an overstatement, but the truth is this—if we are mature in Christ, we will do those things that are demanded by the moral law of God. However, those who “do the moral law of God” may not be mature or even in right relationship with God (as Jesus pointed out regarding the Pharisees and their passionate “rules-righteousness”). Being “moral” is not necessarily a mark of maturity. Maturity means being fully conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. Consider the following scriptures:

- Romans 8:29: “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son...”
- 2 Corinthians 3:18: “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”
- 1 John 3:2: “But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”

What does Christ-likeness really look like? Of what does it consist? Jesus gave the definitive answer. This is more than a matter of “keeping the rules,” though he never denigrated rules. It is a matter of the inner heart and the maturing of a strong and wise character through growth over time. We shall come back again and again to the following theme: *Christian ethics is a matter of the Christian—in mind, motives, decisions, action and character—becoming increasingly like Christ.* It is more than doing what is right. It is becoming right.³

Where do we discover how that happens and what it looks like? We do so by listening to the voice of Jesus Christ. The voice of the Lord Jesus is first and foremost heard in Scripture, both in the Old as well as the New Testament. It is true that he may speak to us through other means, but we recognize his voice in those other ways because we have heard his voice clearly in Scripture. We start with the Gospels because there we have the definitive revelation of who Jesus is and what he said about the life that pleases God.

The Sermon on the Mount:⁴

A. Ethics is rooted in the Kingdom of God

One way of outlining the substance of Christian ethics is by means of a careful exposition of the Sermon on the Mount. (Matthew 5-7; Luke 6:17-49) Christian ethics is the ethics Jesus taught us in the Sermon on the Mount (and elsewhere). It is an ethics rooted in the characteristics of the coming Kingdom of God, foretold and described in the Old Testament and initiated in the life and ministry of Jesus. No other part of the Bible was referred to as often in the first three centuries of the Church as this passage in Matthew. It was considered the Charter of the Christian life, the instructional primer of new disciples of Jesus, the practices that were to characterize the fellowship of faith.⁵

² Paul Lehmann, *Ethics in a Christian Context* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p.54.

³ See the two books of David W. Gill summarizing this very reality: *Becoming Good: Building Moral Character* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000); *Doing Right: Practicing Ethical Principles* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

⁴ Jesus said, “You must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). The Sermon on the Mount is about the “higher righteous” that is demanded of those who are his followers. The new relationship with the Lord Jesus has new obligations.

⁵ Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), provide the most detailed recent ethics based on the Sermon on the Mount. Their book won the 2004 Best Book in Theology/Ethics from *Christianity Today*. Our treatment of the Sermon on the Mount will draw heavily on their ideas.

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The Sermon is rooted in the message of the good news Jesus proclaimed. That proclamation is summarized in Matthew 4:17, “Repent, for the kingdom has come near” and in Mark 1:14-15, “Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news.’”

What he meant by “the Kingdom of God” is best outlined from the texts of the Old Testament. While much effort and time has been spent on trying to determine *when* that Kingdom will come in the future in its fullness, the issue Jesus underlined repeatedly was *being ready* for that event. Our focus of attention is not when it will arrive but to determine the characteristics of that Kingdom and the practices that prepare us for its arrival.

Stassen and Gushee⁶ argue that we need to look at the Old Testament texts from which Jesus quotes most frequently if we are to understand what he meant by the Kingdom. There we can discern the qualities of that Kingdom, particularly from texts in Isaiah and the Psalms. Seventeen passages from Isaiah describe the deliverance of Israel from exile by the power of God’s Kingdom. (Isaiah 9:1-7; 11; 24:14-25:12; 26; 31:1-32:20; 33; 35; 40:1-11; 42:1-44:8; 49; 51:1-52:12; 52:13-53:12; 54; 56; 60; 61; 62) Many chapters of Isaiah focus on the nature and characteristics of God’s reign and Kingdom. In studying them, Stassen and Gushee find five major themes that mark the Kingdom of God:

1. *God’s presence*
2. *Joy*
3. *Deliverance from oppression (salvation)*
4. *Peace*
5. *Justice and righteousness*

They see these same emphases repeated in Paul’s summary in Romans 14:17.

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Here we have four of these five themes (only #3 is not highlighted, though Romans is an exposition of the meaning of salvation). These themes then form a framework for the ethic that Jesus articulates.

Think About It

Answer Box # 3

When you read the list of characteristics of God’s Kingdom, how does it strike you? Are these the qualities with which you associate the ethical ideals of the Christian movement?

B. The Beatitudes

The Sermon on the Mount does not begin with imperatives or rules for living. It begins with prophetic teachings that emphasize what God’s action on our behalf means for us as Christ-followers. The beatitudes congratulate the disciples because God is already acting to deliver them from the power and effects of sin. Luke 4:18 provides a context for the Beatitudes. In Luke, Jesus opens his ministry by quoting words from Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.

⁶ Ibid.

Stassen and Gushee take this clue and show how the Beatitudes echo passages from Isaiah 61⁷

Isaiah 61	Matthew 5
61:1,2—good news to the oppressed...the year of the Lord's favor 61:1,2—to bind up the brokenhearted...to comfort those who mourn 61:7—They will inherit a double portion of the land 61:3—They will be called oaks of righteousness 61:11—So the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations	5:3—Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of God 5:4—Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted 5:5—Blessed are the humble, for they shall inherit the earth 5:6,7—Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness 5:10—Blessed are those who have been persecuted for...righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus' ethic begins with who we are, with what God is doing for us and in us. *First God blesses us, and only then does God ask from us action and motives that correspond with God's character and will.* The beatitudes are not high ideals for which we strive. They are a catalogue of virtues or qualities that God gives us by blessing us with grace. They are also qualities God intends to grow in us. These are virtues or character traits that are to mark our identity and shape our practices. Stassen and Gushee summarize their account in the following way:⁸

The shape of Jesus' fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy is the shape of the drama of the reign of God: God's presence, salvation, peace, joy, and delivering justice. And the virtues of the participants fit the drama: we participate and will be participating in God's merciful, compassionate deliverance. **We.....**

- **are humble** before God, and identify with the humble, the poor, and the outcastes.
- **mourn** with sincere repentance toward God, and comfort others who mourn.
- **are surrendered to God**, committing ourselves to following God's way, and making peace.
- **hunger and thirst** for delivering, community-restoring justice.
- **practice compassion** in action, covenant faithfulness toward those in need.
- **seek God's will** with holistic integrity, in all that we are and do.
- **make peace** with our enemies, as God shows love to God's enemies.
- **are willing to suffer** (just as Jesus suffered) because of our loyalty to Jesus and to justice.

Paul echoes these virtues in six different places in his letters.⁹ While his list does not correspond exactly with those in the Beatitudes, there are a lot of similarities. Below is a table of characteristics Paul mentions at least *twice* in his lists of virtues and gifts of the Spirit that parallel the Beatitudes:¹⁰

Jesus' Beatitudes	Paul's Virtues
Humility and meekness	Humility and gentleness
Righteousness	Righteousness
Mercy	Kindness, compassion, love, forgiveness
Purity of heart	Purity or goodness
Peacemaking	Peace, tolerance, unity, patience
Suffering persecution for justice and Jesus' sake (blessed are you)	Endurance joy

A close examination of the ethical instructions of Jesus and Paul demonstrates a common pattern—both start with *what God does for us* before moving to *what God asks from us* in response. Theological writers put it this way—the indicative (what is) comes before the imperative (what we are commanded to do). Before we are asked to live a life that is shaped by Christ-likeness, we must

⁷ Ibid., p. 35.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 37-47. The quote is from p. 47. Emphasis added.

⁹ Colossians 3:12-17; Philippians 2:2-3; Ephesians 4:2-3, 32; Galatians 5:22-23; Romans 14:17; 15:4-5; 2 Corinthians 6:4-10 is the basis for this list. 1 Timothy 4:12; 6:11; 2 Timothy 2:22; 3:10; 1 Peter 3:8; 2 Peter 1:5-7 also advocate many of the same virtues. By comparison, Paul also has long lists of "vices" that are the opposite sorts of qualities and conduct that should never be the pattern of Christian conduct. See Appendix A in Unit 3 for those lists.

¹⁰ Stassen and Gushee, op. cit., p. 48.

experience the transforming grace of God through forgiveness and justification by faith. First we are made new creations by grace; then grace within us energizes a life of holiness and righteousness. First we are blessed with the grace and gifts of salvation, and only then does God ask us to enter the process of sanctification whereby our practices and character are increasingly transformed into the likeness of Christ.

C. The Instructions of the Sermon on the Mount

The Beatitudes are followed by a long section of instruction in righteousness. Those blessed by God are told their role and function (“You are the salt...and light of the earth” - Matthew 5:13-16). The disciples are not told to *become* salt and light. If they have been blessed by being brought into the Kingdom of God, then this is what they are. *This is already their identity*, if they are authentic disciples of Jesus. What sort of life is “salty” and emits “light”? The rest of the Sermon spells that out in clear ethical instruction.

The major instructional section the Sermon on the Mount follows a pattern of instruction in which traditional understandings and practices of righteousness are matched with transforming initiatives. Fourteen areas are mentioned in Jesus’ instruction. In each case there is a practice of righteousness or a principle of behavior that is underscored and then followed by description of the sort of futile, vicious cycle that reinforces and generates the conduct being regulated. Each is followed by an imperative for a “greater” or “higher” righteousness that is transformative. Simply doing what is traditionally considered “right” is not enough. There are three elements in each teaching about fourteen instances or areas of “righteous” behavior. An example of this pattern is as follows¹¹:

Traditional Righteousness	Vicious Cycle	Transforming Initiative
5:21—You have heard that it was said to people long ago, “You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.”	5:22—But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, “Raca,” is answerable to the Sanhedrin. And anyone who says, “You fool!” will be in danger of the fire of hell.	5:23-26—Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, <i>leave</i> your gift there in front of the altar. First <i>go</i> and <i>be reconciled</i> to that person and then come and <i>offer</i> your gift. <i>Settle matters</i> quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. Truly, I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

A number of things are noteworthy in this focal instance¹² of the sort of character and conduct that is to mark the life of the disciple.

1. The imperatives for Christian living come in the third, climactic element (transforming initiatives). In this instance there is *no* command not to be angry. Jesus himself was angry. (Mark 1:41; 3:5, Matthew 21:12-17; Matthew 23) Paul’s injunction is to be angry and sin not. (Ephesians 4:26) Jesus’ commands are found in this third element (highlighted by underlining and italics). They are practices or practical steps that will transform the angry person into a peacemaker. Following Jesus’ commands may have the effect of transforming the relationship so that the enemy becomes a friend. The purpose of the command looks to avoid the consequences of anger that break the community and can create long-lasting alienation. The practices commanded are those that reinforce the Kingdom quality of peace.
2. The vicious cycle Jesus identifies begins in the attitudes and practices that are on the way to murder, anger and contemptuous insults. These are the roots of murder and violence. The attitudes and words set up the cycle of violence, and violence then generates such attitudes and words all over again, and so on. The anger and words are one of the typical reasons peace does not mark our social relationships. When something is the cause of anger and alienation, we are not to respond simply with cold and festering anger or contemptuous insults and feel righteous because we have not murdered them. Simply restraining from violence is not what Jesus seeks.

¹¹ Matthew 5:21-26; emphasis added.

¹² A focal instance is an exemplar, a particular situation, behavior or attitude *on which one is focused*. It is a particular instance of a larger set of situations, behaviors or attitudes. It is not meant to be a complete account. By focusing on a concrete example, the instruction provides us with enough detail to understand how, in similar sorts of situations, behaviors or attitudes, those guidelines shape our response and initiative. It is an example of what we often do—use analogy to move from one case situation to another. We look for similarities between two patterns of facts in different situations in order to determine whether the same rule or principle might apply in the second case situation, having already determined that it does apply in the first.

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We are to actively take the initiative in seeking reconciliation. He is taking aim at attitudes, words and practices that reinforce the vicious cycle of contempt and violence.

3. **The traditional practice** was based on an interpretation of Old Testament commands, but it was literalistic. So long as one did not murder, the law had been kept. One was righteous. Jesus moves the discussion from the external conformity to a rule into the internal attitude (and to verbal abuse that denigrates and degrades another at whom we are angry). There is no Old Testament rule as such against insult. Jesus calls the teachers of the law and Pharisees “blind fools.” (Matthew 23:17) His unfolding of the full meaning of the law about murder is not literalistic (or one would argue that he violated his own teachings). Anger has danger lurking in it (as was the case with Cain’s anger about Abel and God’s favor).
4. The Sermon on the Mount is not a complete ethics encyclopedia. Jesus is not covering all the areas and all the issues that make up a comprehensive ethics. These are focused instances, often with specific, practical examples of the sort of thing about which he is talking. By analogy we can think of other applications and relevancies for what he teaches. It is noteworthy that we see that the very elements of Christian ethics are at use in Jesus’ own words—rules (commands in the Old Testament and Jesus’ own commands), motives or intentions (anger/contempt) and consequences (what will happen if reconciliation doesn’t take place).

While this scheme is not perfect, it suggests a framework for a more complete analysis. Stassen and Gushee use it as an interpretive framework to summarize the various elements of the Sermon.¹³

Traditional Righteousness	Vicious Cycle	Transforming Initiative
1. You shall not kill	Being angry or saying, You fool!	Go, be reconciled
2. You shall not commit adultery	Looking with lust is adultery in the heart	Remove the cause of temptation (cf. Mark 9:43-50)
3. Whoever divorces, give a certificate	Divorcing involves you in adultery	(Be reconciled: 1 Corinthians 7:11)
4. You shall not swear falsely	Swearing by anything involves you in a false claim	Let your yes be yes and your no be no
5. Eye for eye, tooth for tooth	Retaliating violently or revengefully, by evil means	Turn the other cheek, give your tunic and cloak, go the second mile, give to beggar and borrower
6. Love neighbor and hate enemy	Hating enemy is the same vicious cycle that you see in the Gentiles and tax collectors	Love enemies, pray for your persecutors; be all-inclusive as your Father in heaven is
7. When you give alms,	Practicing righteousness for show	But give in secret, and your Father will reward you
8. When you pray,	Practicing righteousness for show	But pray in secret, and your Father will reward you
9. When you pray,	Heaping up empty phrases	Therefore, pray like this: Our Father....
10. When you fast,	Practicing righteousness for show	But dress with joy, and your Father will reward you
11. Do not pile up treasures on earth	Moth and rust destroy, and thieves enter and steal	But pile up treasures in heaven
12. No one can serve two masters	Serving God and wealth, worrying about food and clothes	But seek first God’s reign and God’s justice/righteousness
13. Do not judge, lest you be judged	Judging others means you will be judged by the same measure	First take the log out of your own eye
14. Do not give holy things to dogs, nor pearls to pigs	They will trample them and tear you to pieces	Give your trust in prayer to your Father in heaven.

You can see from this list that ethics for the Christian involves more than what conventionally is thought to be moral matters. Most would not define fasting or praying as “ethical” issues, but Jesus does. Neither does Jesus limit himself to seeing rule-conformity as a sufficient basis for thinking and living ethically. The motives and consequences of conduct must also be considered. Character is highlighted in the preface to the Sermon in the Beatitudes and in the “You are...” sayings. We have a basis in the Sermon for concerning ourselves with rules, intentions (motives/attitudes), consequences and character. Christian ethics brings them all to our attention and consideration.

¹³ Ibid., p. 142. The rest of the book develops these instructions of the Sermon while looking at major areas of concern in Christian ethics.

Think About It

Answer Box # 4

What role do you see the instructions of the Sermon on the Mount playing in Christian ethics? Have the emphases of Jesus been the emphases of what you have heard preached and taught in your church community? If not, why not?

The challenge of taking the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount seriously leads us to ask, "How can we do this?" Let's look at what the Apostle Paul wrote as an extension of the Old Testament law and Jesus' own ethical instructions.

IV. Following Jesus with the Spirit's help

(Romans 8:1-17; Galatians 5:13-25 Philippians 2:12-13)

Bible reading: Read the above biblical texts before continuing the module below.

When we read the letters written by the Apostle Paul we see that he was fighting against widespread false ideas of how to please God and how to live as God intended. Moses had received commandments from God about how Israel should live as God's people, but contemporary religious leaders in Paul's day had abandoned the proper use of these laws. They taught that keeping the law was the condition for being accepted by God rather than presenting the law as God's direction for how to live faithfully as God's children. They had also added interpretations of the law that negated its force and focused on details while neglecting the weightier matters such as love and justice.

Therefore, Paul spent time and effort in condemning the idea that the laws of God were the means of salvation. He proclaimed the good news that salvation and acceptance with God were not obtained through keeping the law (which no one but Jesus ever did completely), but that salvation came as a gracious gift of God to those who put their faith in Jesus Christ. (Romans 3) Salvation is not through our human works but rather through the merciful work of Jesus on our behalf. (Ephesians 2) However, salvation leads to good works. (Philippians 2:12-13) Only by clearing away this false idea of the purpose of God's law could the law be restored to its positive function of helping God's people see how to live according to God's will. Paul believed that once people are converted, God expects them to go on and live with love and justice. They are to exhibit righteousness in their relationships and conduct.

Paul's letter to the Galatians, chapter five, verses thirteen through twenty-five, gives a good picture of the contrast between the two kinds of lives that Christians can choose. Because God accepts us freely on the basis of Christ's work rather than on the basis of our keeping the law, we are freed from having to live legalistically. The great challenge that remains for us is what we will do with our freedom. One option is to indulge our sinful nature that we still carry as fallen human beings. Paul describes this sort of behavior in Galatians 5:19-21. The other option is to live according to the new nature that God the Spirit wants to manifest in our lives. Paul describes this in Galatians 5:22-23 and summarizes it in Galatians 5:14—"Love your neighbor as yourself." In verses thirteen, twenty-four and twenty-five Paul makes it clear that for the fruit of the Spirit to be evident in our lives we must be actively engaged in resisting the sinful nature as well as letting the Spirit lead us into the life of love that God wants for us.

Paul sees salvation in three tenses—I have been saved; I am being saved; I will be saved. My past guilt has been removed by the forgiveness of God through the work of Jesus Christ. The penalty of sin has been removed. In the present I am being cleansed from my daily sins and being sanctified by the work of the Spirit as the power of sin is being broken in my life. In the future, I will be saved to the uttermost when the presence of sin will be removed when Christ returns and I am fully conformed to his image.

Although initial salvation comes solely on the basis of grace through faith without first doing works of any kind, working out one's salvation involves deeds, not just beliefs about or trust in God. Paul makes that clear in Philippians 2:12-13. By the Spirit, God works in us both the "wanting to do" and the "doing" of those deeds of justice and righteousness God has already prepared for us in order to fulfill God's purpose in saving us.

Is it possible for us to see in our lives the love for God and the obedience to God's law that both God and we desire? Not perfectly, for we still carry the old nature within us, but according to Paul in Romans 8:1-17, the justice that the law requires, which was satisfied by the death of Christ (8:1-3), can now begin to be realized visibly in us because of the presence of the Spirit (8:4-11). As we live in dependence upon the Spirit rather than in slavery to our sinful natures, we will be led by the Spirit. We will

begin to see God's good, loving deeds in our lives to which God, through God's law, calls us rather than the bad deeds of our old nature. (Romans 8:12-17)

There are two extremes to avoid. One is the idea that our ability to obey God's will depends completely on us. The good news is that God the Holy Spirit lives within the Christian to help her or him live in a way that is consistent with God's nature that shines through the Ten Commandments and that is seen in Jesus himself. When we see the fruit of the Spirit in our lives and find ourselves obeying God's moral law, we can rejoice in this evidence that God is present within us and carrying on God's work of conforming us to the image of God's Son. (Romans 8:28; Philippians 1:6) We are not left to our own devices. We would never reach the goal were that the case. Right conduct and character is enabled by the grace of God that comes to us by the work of the Spirit.

The other extreme to avoid is the notion that our ability to obey God's will depends exclusively on God and that we don't have to do anything but remain passive instruments in God's hands. Living ethically as Christians and as Christian leaders is a battle that requires all the effort, strength, wisdom and perseverance we can summon. Sloth, the refusal to be fully human, to allow our life to fritter away, to be degenerate, to lower ourselves into addictions etc., does not accomplish God's purposes in us or around us. We must be alert, courageous and vigilant in doing what we can as co-workers with God the Spirit "who is at work in you, both to will and to work in order to fulfill His good purpose." (Philippians 2:13)

Salvation (in the present) is a work in progress. Paul urges us to be active. We are to "put off" (an imperative command) the old ways (Ephesians 4:25-32) and to "follow" and "walk" in the way of love (Ephesians 5:1-7). We are to "put on" the full armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-20). Passivity is not a sign of faith, but rather of faithlessness. If grace is at work in the members of our body, then there will be energetic actions whereby we positively seek to "put on" the characteristics of a life of love and justice. The disciplines of the Spirit will become a part of our training in righteousness. We respond to the urgings of the Spirit of God by taking definite action to incarnate in our lives the "ways" of love and justice. We say "no" to the deeds of darkness and "yes" to the ways of righteousness and holiness.

Think About It

Answer Box # 5

What do you think God wants you to learn and do through the study of this passage (Galatians 5:13-25)?

1. Relationships with people you don't like (Romans 12:14-21)

As Christians and as leaders we sometimes find it necessary to live in relationships with people who make our lives difficult. They may be believers or unbelievers, family members or associates, young or old. Whoever they are, we discover that they do not fully share our values and practices. Some of these people may dislike us to the point of intentionally making trouble in our lives and work. A few may actively persecute us and try to do evil things to us. How shall we think about people like this, and how shall we treat them?

Bible Reading: Read the above biblical text before continuing the text below.

Paul wrote of five things we should not do and five things we should try to do in relation to those who make life hard for us.

Not to do:

1. Do not curse them.
2. Do not be haughty in your thoughts toward them.
3. Never pay back evil for evil.
4. Never take revenge on them.
5. Do not be overcome by their evil.

To do:

1. Bless them.
2. If possible, be at peace with them.
3. Leave vengeance to God.
4. Contribute to their basic needs (food, water, etc.).
5. Overcome evil with good.

The temptation to react violently to evil treatment is very strong. Paul calls us to subvert violence by loving our enemies and hoping to transform them from enemy to friend in this way. Never returning evil for evil (Romans 12:17) is in complete harmony with Jesus' command to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44). In this way, love is translated into non-violence and a refusal to take the path of revenge.

Jesus did not say such attitudes and actions would be easy. Instead he taught that they would be right. That is a big challenge for us, to resist doing what we want to do to such people and instead to do what God wants us to do. The role of wisdom is underscored again, for we need to "resist evil" but not do it in a way that we destroy people as well. It is not natural for us to treat hurtful people with kindness. For most of us, in situations like this we need the grace of God in great measure. We need to see unfriendly people as God does and to pray for wisdom about how to respond in peace rather than to retaliate in hostility.

I saw this spirit demonstrated in a powerful way when I visited an African friend, a judge, in the capital city of a country that had experienced three civil wars in the 1990s. This man was caring for the two young sons of his brother who had been in danger from his enemies. My friend, with his two nephews, went to the house of his brother and found him murdered in his own home. Immediately, the judge said to his two nephews, "Now we are going to kneel right here and pray a prayer of forgiveness for the men who killed your father." And they did. Today, those two boys do not harbor bitterness in their hearts toward their father's murderers. What a model of Christ-like leadership and Christian ethics this judge, who lost his brother, showed to his brother's sons!

Think About It

Answer Box # 6

1. Are there people in your life who treat you like an enemy? How have you been taught to respond to such people?
2. Does any teaching from your family or social or ethnic group conflict with what Paul writes in Romans 12?
3. At what points do you think you need to reconsider your own attitudes and behavior toward people who treat you unkindly or with evil intent?

2. What about marital relationships? Is celibacy an option? (I Corinthians 7:1-40)

The issue of how we live ethically in our relationships raises the question of marriage. Marriage is one of the closest human relationships that human beings can experience. It can also be one of the most complex and most difficult. Some people have argued that being celibate is ethically more pleasing to God and more spiritual than being married.

Paul's longest discourse on marriage and sexuality is found in I Corinthians 6:12-7:40. Having addressed the question of sexual immorality in chapter six (this is clearly a violation of Christian ethics, prohibited by the seventh Commandment) and laid the foundations of a theology and ethic of the body and sexuality, Paul follows in chapter seven with his positive teaching on Christian marriage and sexuality. This chapter needs to be read against the background of the Corinthian situation to which he referred in verse twenty-six, "the present crisis," which is probably a reference to the hostile and immoral environment of Corinth. The temple to Aphrodite in Corinth had at one time 1,000 prostitute priestesses. Paul confronts some Corinthian factions whose response to this immorality was to see sexuality itself as sinful or at least undesirable. However, Paul is clear—spirituality is not incompatible with robust sexuality. The conjugal relationship of a man and a woman within the framework of marriage is described positively by Paul in verses two to five with further positive references in verses twenty-eight, thirty-six, and thirty-nine.

Bible Reading: In light of these remarks, please read I Corinthians 6:12-7:40 before continuing the module.

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In the text you have read the values of mutual appreciation and mutual dependence between husband and wife in the context of the God-given structure of sexuality. These ideals are upheld by Paul. (See also his teaching in Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:18-19; I Timothy 3:2, 12.) In I Timothy 5:14, Paul urges young widows to marry and writes in I Timothy 4:1-3 that forbidding to marry is a sign of apostasy.

At the same time, Paul discusses how marriage can detract people from what he calls "the Lord's affairs." (7:32-35) He also strongly defends the legitimacy of celibacy, including his own unmarried status, as a special calling. How do we understand the relative importance of these alternative social states in light of the Gospel? Immorality is clearly not a Christian path, but both marriage and celibacy are legitimate options. Christian liberty permits either.

A key to understanding this passage may be found in verses 17-24. The major ethical issue here is not a choice between marriage and celibacy. Rather, it is being persuaded that one is in the condition to which God has called him or her (7:17). It's not the social situation that counts, whether marriage or celibacy, circumcision or uncircumcision, slavery or freedom. It's belonging to Christ and keeping his commands that are important (7:19, 22-23). There are no social conditions necessary to belonging to Christ. In Christ, we are equal brothers and sisters. Spiritually, we are free in Christ as well as slaves to Christ, regardless of our social situation.

The Gospel upholds the sanctity of marriage. (Hebrews 13:4) It does not support the idea that asceticism within marriage, or celibacy as an alternative to marriage, is a more spiritual state. Instead, the Gospel makes all social conditions secondary to one's relationship to Christ. Paul is supportive of improving one's social conditions when possible. (7:21) However, Paul's more important ethical concern is that one be in the marital or religious or social situation to which God has called him or her.

If we put this within the larger biblical context we can see that there is a shift from the Old Testament to the New. The Old Testament underscores fertility and multiplying to fill the earth. It promises that the seed of the woman (Genesis 2:15) would come and crush the head of the "serpent." The Old Testament looks forward to the coming of the Kingdom and God's Messiah. Once that child has come, this imperative assumes a different significance. Now people can renounce marriage—some "have made themselves eunuchs because of the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 19:12) THE child (Jesus) has come, so childbearing and marriage no longer have the same theological meaning. Celibacy and childlessness (barrenness) no longer have the same tragic accent.

In this passage about marriage and celibacy, Paul discusses a deeper message about the ethics of our relationships and our unity in Christ. Social status should not to govern ethical attitudes and actions in the body of Christ and neither should marital status. Marital status is an issue of personal calling. It is wrong for married people to look down on unmarried individuals as though they were living at an inferior level before God. Relationship and obedience to Christ are what matters. Our common relationship to Christ puts us all on the same basis in his sight and creates an equality of relationship among us, regardless of our marital decisions.

That is the ethical position we need to respect as Christians and leaders of churches and Christian organizations. Discrimination on the basis of marital status is unethical. There are special ways in which we deal with one another in work roles, as employers and employees, but at the level of our identity as persons, created in God's image and redeemed by Christ, we need to remember what Paul wrote to the Galatians, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 2:28)

Think About It

Answer Box # 7

1. Does Paul's view of marriage differ from that of most people in your society? If so, how?
2. Has the impurity of sexual practices in your social context given you a negative view of sexuality in marriage? If so, what ideas need to change?
3. Does your society regard celibacy as a less spiritual or more spiritual state than marriage? What should be a Christian's perspective in light of Paul's teaching?
4. Do you think of your marital or religious or social status as being part of God's calling for you? Do most other Christians in your church think this way?

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There are many ethical issues connected with marriage, child-raising, family life, relational problems within marriage, divorce, child custody, inheritance disputes, treatment of widows and orphans, remarriage, sexual relationships outside of marriage, etc. Entire books are written on these subjects. In this course we are seeking to treat a few issues, to illustrate methods that can be useful for examining other issues not dealt with here and to encourage participants to identify the problems that need attention in their particular contexts. As we have already seen, one challenge is to understand what attitudes and actions please God with respect to a particular issue, while another challenge is to determine how to translate conviction into concrete actions that will lead to greater ethical faithfulness.

One issue that is causing great concern among Christians in North America is abortion. Another is male and female homosexuality as well as same-sex marriage. Perhaps these moral problems are less acute in Africa and Asia, but they are likely to become more significant in the future as occidental values and life-styles increasingly penetrate the majority world.

Think About It

Answer Box # 8

If you were asked to make a thoughtful, biblically informed and culturally sensitive statement about these problems in your society, to what people or resources would you turn for help? Do most Christians in your context need help in thinking through these issues? Are these issues urgently in need of attention today? Are Christians willing to discuss them?

Models: Moses

Moses is a unique figure in the Old Testament. His leadership delivered the children of Abraham from slavery and ushered them into the Promised Land. He acted as a prophet and as a royal figure. He was not a king, so it is a bit misleading to see him as a royal figure. However, before the kings ruled in Israel, Moses served as the political leader and embodies the values of the royal paradigm.

The king and prophet were representatives of the people. They mediated between God and the community. The people were expected to imitate them only indirectly, but the people were to be committed to the central values ideally embodied in the performance of the king and priest's duties as was the case in the other ethical models and paradigms.

This is true for the priestly paradigm. Holiness was its central value. Holiness did not depend solely on the priest to ensure it. Holiness was something all Israelites were to pursue. The same was true of the wisdom paradigm as epitomized in the sage. Wisdom was an intellectual and ethical pursuit of prudence in everyday affairs. While the sage might display it in fullest measure, all Israelites were to seek knowledge, understanding and instruction in the matters of daily life.

The royal paradigm centers on justice or righteousness for the whole community. The political leader was to embody justice in his own person as well as defend it and ensure that it structured the life of the people. Moses is motivated from his young adulthood by outrage at the injustice that crushed the people of Israel. His actions are aimed at rectifying this injustice and establishing justice for the people.

However, he also was a prophet. The word of the Lord came through him as he mediated it to the newly freed people in the wilderness. The Torah stands as a monumental document of instruction and guidelines for a life of holiness, prudence and justice. As the prophets were to do after him, Moses announced the will and way of God for the people of God and pointed them to the central values that were to govern their lives.

He too faced a difficult ethical choice. The right way appeared to him as the hard way, the costly way. Jesus seemed to agree that this is generally true when he spoke about the narrow and wide gates. Jesus said, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." (Matthew 7:13-14)

Giving up social, economic and political power in order to do God's justice: (Exodus 2-14; Hebrews 11:24-29)

Bible reading: Read the above biblical texts before continuing the module below (for the Exodus chapters, skim and remind yourself of the main outlines of the life of Moses).

Moses' life is another biblical example that can instruct us. Instead of accepting the easy life of being the adopted son of the most powerful leader of Egypt, Moses chose instead to identify himself and

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suffer with the slaves of the Pharaoh, the oppressed descendants of Abraham. (Hebrews 11:24-29; Exodus 2-14) He identified with the oppressed and refused to remain identified with the privileged power that was enacting injustice. The love of neighbor cannot remain passive in the face of clear injustice.

He heard God call him through a burning bush to confront Pharaoh and to demand the release of the Hebrew slaves. Moses reluctantly obeyed, led the people to the Red Sea and saw God miraculously deliver them from the king of Egypt through the sea. God then made Moses the leader of God's people for the next forty years. A summary of how Moses lived is as follows:

- **His ethical challenge:** to give up social prestige and political power for the sake of enslaved people whom God wanted to deliver.
- **His ethical action:** to leave position and riches and then to confront a powerful king for the sake of God's call and the people God loved.
- **His temptation:** to take the easy road to wealth and power in spite of the suffering of his people, the Hebrew slaves.
- **The cost of his doing what was right:** becoming a fugitive, poor and powerless, for forty years in the wilderness.
- **The reward of his doing what was right:** seeing God use him to deliver and lead God's people out of slavery to the promised land.

Think About It

Answer Box # 9

1. Have you experienced a conflict between the easy way you wanted to follow and the hard way that you believed God wanted you to follow? What did you do? How did you feel about your action? What might have happened if you had done the other thing?
2. Would you like to live differently in the future? If so, how?

Summary

We have taken a quick look at the ethics of Jesus, embodied in the Sermon on the Mount. This glance is not sufficient, by any means, as a summary of the teaching of Jesus about our ethical and moral conduct and character. We find in his teaching, rooted in the Kingdom of God, an echo of the laws of Moses while at the same time turning the focus to inner attitudes and character. We find in his teachings (and Paul as well) the same sequence we noticed in the Ten Commandments—what God does for us (grace) comes *before* what God asks us to do in response (law). After a quick snapshot of the Sermon on the Mount we looked at some of Paul's ethical instructions regarding people we don't like as well as marriage and celibacy. The closing material dealt with Paul's theology of the Spirit. To live according to the Ten Commandments or the Sermon on the Mount is something possible only by the enlivening, illuminating, essential work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

The appendix to this unit gives you an example of ethical reasoning from all of Scripture dealing with the claims of some within the Church that we should change the ethical teachings of Jewish and Christian historical traditions. In short, that we should bless long-term, same-sex, monogamous relationships as equivalent to heterosexual marriage. This appears a "simple" issue to many Christians. However, science, history, culture and pastoral considerations are part of the larger picture along with the interpretation of a wide range of Scripture. This reminds us that many contemporary ethical issues require careful, in-depth analysis if we are to address them fairly and in the light of all the evidence and truth at our disposal.

Unit 8 Final Assignment

Final Assignment

1. Write on one to two pages your thoughts about the nature of love in a biblical perspective and how you see the importance of love impacting specific types of relationships in your personal life and with those you encounter in the organization or church in which you work.
2. On another one to two pages write some ideas you have as you look through the instruction of the Sermon on the Mount. As you think about the qualities of the Beatitudes, how do you think the Christian community's life and practice would be different if Christians were marked by these qualities day in and day out?
3. Please confirm that you have discussed the results of your interactive work in Unit 8 ("Think About It" boxes) with a group of two other people. (See "Note on Process" on page v in the "Expectations for the Course" section of the Introduction to the Course.)
4. Have you read Stott, pp. 135-188 Caring for Creation; Living with Global Poverty? Why should Christians participate in or be concerned with environmental issues? What can they hope to accomplish? What relevance do the words of Jesus have to issues of caring for Creation?

When your work is complete (three to five pages total), send a copy to your facilitator via email as an attachment. Please send it by the date indicated in the Module Calendar.

Appendix A: Issues Surrounding Same-Sex Sexuality

The following paper by Dr. David A. Fraser explores issues that surround claims about same-sex sexuality. Debate has erupted, particularly in the Western Church where some denominations have concluded that committed, long-term, self-affirmed and active sexual relations between same-sex partners should be blessed by the Church. Those who practice this life are, in some of those denominations, ordained to full ministry. This paper explores the arguments from Scripture, theology, science, cultural studies and pastoral concerns. It argues the following:

1. Scripture is of one voice and view—the practice of sexual relations is reserved for marriage between a man and a woman.
2. The attempts by some interpretive methods to challenge the consistent heterosexism of the Bible have uniformly failed and have resorted to dismissing key texts that undergird the basis for heterosexuality as the norm for sexual relationships.
3. There are no decisive or persuasive arguments from science that have ethical weight in dismissing the limits on sexuality that the Old Testament, Jesus and the New Testament place on sexuality.
4. There are no decisive or persuasive arguments from cultural studies or cultural interpretations of Scripture that overturn this conclusion.
5. There are no adequate pastoral rationales for arguing that long-term, committed, monogamous same-sex bondings are equivalent to marriage or should be allowed and blessed as a less than ideal but better than other alternatives.

Theses on a Biblical Theology and Ethics of Sexuality

Four basic questions need to be answered.

The first question asks about the interpretation of the texts of the Bible dealing with sexuality in general and homosexuality in particular. What does the Bible say, and what do those texts mean? That is a historical, grammatical, critical and interpretive endeavor. It seeks to listen to what the Bible says, regardless of whether we agree with it or not, like it or not. We should not agree or disagree until we can say, "We understand."

1. **The Creation story in Genesis 1-2 portrays the complementarity of male and female. That difference and similarity is the grounding basis for human community in general and for marriage in particular.**
 - a. Marriage in general, and sexual intercourse in particular, is the attachment between two different yet equal and complementary beings (male and female). They are joined to become one flesh, a reunion with one's sexual other ("bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh"). The creation from Adam's rib marks the "other" as similar to the male, from and therefore complementary to the male. (Genesis 1:25-29)
 - b. It is the complementarity of male and female that constitutes the potential for the imaging of God. (Genesis 1:27, note the Hebrew parallelism)
 - c. It is the whole physical, interpersonal and procreative sexual complementarity of male and female that justifies and establishes the dominant, single and consistent heterosexual perspective found throughout the whole of canonical Scripture. (Genesis 1-2)
 - d. It is the relational, not the procreational, complementarity that is marked as central. (Genesis 2:24) That relational complementarity is between a male and a female.
 - e. A different Creation story would be required to legitimate and ground same-sex marriage and/or intercourse as designed and intended by God.
2. **The Old Testament's narratives, legal codes, wisdom literature and prophetic texts are consistently heterosexual in portraying and norming sexual relations. They serve to establish sexual relations as legitimated only between a male and a female in a married state. There are no exceptions to this.**
 - a. No human sexual intercourse other than heterosexual intercourse between a married male and female is approved or idealized. Heterosexual erotic love is approved and idealized e.g., Song of Songs, narratives, prophetic analogies. Homosexual eroticism is never approved or idealized.
 - b. Not all heterosexual intercourse is approved. Pre-marital (fornication), extra-marital (adultery) and stated interfamily (incest) intercourse are considered violations of Creation's intent and God's will. Heterosexual intercourse with animals is banned. (Exodus 22:19; Leviticus 18:23; 20:15–16; Deuteronomy 27:21)
 - c. Prostitution, whether commercial or cultic, is a violation of biblical sexual ethics, as well as forms of coercive or exploitative heterosexuality (e.g., rape, sex with slaves).

- d. Homosexual intercourse is consistently banned as contrary to God's will. This is clearly articulated in the Holiness Code. Leviticus (18:22; 20:13) forbids all male homosexual intercourse. It evaluates it as an abomination and does so in an unqualified fashion (i.e., it does not limit the ban to age-unequals [pederasty], people of unequal social status [exploitative master-slave relations], sex for pay [male prostitution], homosexual rape or idolatrous ritual sex [male religious cult prostitution]). This comes in a complex text that has ethical and cultural matters legislated for Israel that stand at differing levels of importance and address, in some cases, cultural issues no longer relevant. The legislation on sexual ethics is, however, continued in the New Testament, while other matters of Leviticus are discontinued.
 - e. Note on the use of Leviticus in the New Testament: The New Testament distinguishes between permanent elements of that legislation and culturally-bound aspects. Some dismiss Leviticus on the grounds that it is concerned with ritual purity rather than morality, and we have been released from ritual purity concerns. The issue is whether the Holiness Code's concern with purity is informed by substantive moral concerns that carry over into the New Testament. That appears to be the case with the use of this code in Acts 15 and also in the concerns of I Corinthians 6:9-10 (which have their precedent in the Holiness Code). In addition, Leviticus 18 and 20 provide parallel prohibitions of such moral actions as incest (18:6-18; 20:7, 11-12, 19-21), adultery (18:20; 20:10), child sacrifice (18:21; 20:2-5) and bestiality (18:23; 20:15-16). The bridge chapter (Leviticus 19) contains the second half of the great commandment (19:17-18). It also prohibits theft and fraud (19:11), oppression of neighbors and robbery (19:13) and injustice (19:15). It prescribes concern for the deaf and blind (19:14), justice in the marketplace (19:35-36) and love of neighbor as the encompassing norm (19:18). This indicates Leviticus' importance to moral concerns.
 - f. Female homosexual intercourse is not discussed in the Old Testament. This does not mean it was approved. One suggested reason for silence on this is that it was nearly never encountered.
 - g. There are no positive stories idealizing homosexual practice. All the stories dealing with potential or actual homosexual patterns portray it as sinful (e.g., the story of Ham [Genesis 9:20-27—homosexual incest], Sodom [Genesis 19:4-11—intended homosexual rape] and the Levite and concubine [Judges 19:22-26]). These stories are all exploitative events so that the question remains—are these sinful events because they are exploitative, or are they sinful both because they are coercive and intend homosexual acts?
 - h. The primary reason for banning same-sex intercourse is gender *d*/iscomplementarity as a violation of the created order. It mixes two things never intended by the Creator's design to be mixed.
 - i. Same-sex intercourse confuses divinely sanctioned boundaries and is a clear-cut transgression of the most fundamental element of human sexuality (viz. the creational structure of the anatomical and procreational "fit" between male and female).
 - j. The complementary gendering of male and female in anatomical, physiological and procreative ways underlies the entire positive accent on heterosexual married intercourse and the negative proscribing of homosexual intercourse. This does not romanticize heterosexuality in a fallen world. It does ground the ethical and theological evaluation of the range of alternative sexualities humans practice.
 - k. Sexual differentiation and complementarity as established in Creation is the underlying foundational given that grounds the proscription of same-sex intercourse—not exploitation, idolatry, age differences, status differences, misogyny or other possible explanations.
- 3. The New Testament's narratives, normative codes, expository letters and wisdom sayings are consistently heterosexual in portraying and norming sexual relations. The New Testament agrees with the Old Testament that sexual relations are only legitimated between a male and a female in a married state. There are no exceptions to this.**
- a. The New Testament carries forward the Old Testament theology and ethics of sexuality, limiting legitimate sexual intercourse to the relationship of males and females married to each other as the only divinely approved pattern.
 - b. Jesus sanctions Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 as core, normative texts for evaluating notions of marriage and sex. (Mark 10:1-12) It demonstrates that Jesus accepted the model for marriage and sexual union set forth in Genesis 1-2.
 - c. Jesus' words on sexual ethics do not deal with homosexuality directly. On sexual issues, his standards are tighter than the Old Testament (reaching into motives—e.g., Matthew 5:27-32), not looser. It is historically ludicrous to suppose Jesus approved homosexuality in contradistinction to the Old Testament, intertestamental and his own day's uniform Jewish disapproval.
 - d. The New Testament adds to the Old Testament commentary explicit references to female same-sex eroticism as also an expression of sin. (Romans 1:24-27)

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- e. In Romans 1, Paul's appeal to Creation ("nature") as manifested in the anatomic and physiological observables of males and females affirms and extends the significance and meaning of Genesis 1-2 and the Holiness Code of Leviticus.
- f. Homoeroticism is a clear expression of the human revolt against divinely structured natural order.
- g. Gender differentiation and complementarity, witnessed to by anatomic and procreational "fittedness," is discernible even by Gentiles with no knowledge of God's special revelation. Therefore, there is no excuse when men lie with men as with women or women exchange the "natural" use of men to be with each other, even for those "without" the law.
- h. Same-sex intercourse, both male and female, witnesses to the deliberate suppression of the visible evidences in nature of the design and will of the Creator.
- i. Paul adopts, revises and constructs a number of "vice lists" in which he defines human moral and ethical practices that produce the effect of exclusion from God's Kingdom. (Romans 1:18-32; I Corinthians 6:9-11; Galatians 5:19-22; Colossians 3:5-9; Ephesians 4:25-5:14; I Timothy 1:6-10; II Timothy 3:2-9) There are many relational elements included in these lists (other than sexuality) that provide very high standards of conduct and relationship for Christians. Grace saves us all by changing us and our world. Grace is transformational here and now.
- j. Both the practice of passive and active partners in homosexual intercourse are included in the list of actions whose doers will not "inherit the Kingdom of God." (I Corinthians 6:9-10; I Timothy 1:10) This refers to the unrepentant continuation of such actions by any persons, in or outside the fellowship of the Church.
- k. Paul asserts that the *practice* of such homosexual behavior can and was changed. (I Corinthians 6:11)
- l. Paul, along with the rest of the Bible, shows a lack of interest in "orientation" or "origins" of homoerotic desires. What matters are not the origins of sexual impulses but the response to them in fantasy life and action.
- m. Despite clear evidence for loving, non-coercive, long-term bonded homosexuality in the Greco-Roman world, the New Testament rejects all homosexual practice as contrary to the Gospel of Christ without qualification (i.e., it did not simply reject bad forms of homosexuality such as ritualized cult homosexuality, pederasty, child prostitution, homosexual concubinage, homosexual rape, etc.).

Conclusion: The consistent and sole perspective on the *practice* of sexual relations in the Bible is that the Creator designed and wills intercourse to be between a married man and woman. That reunion with one's "sexual other" entails life-long commitment, exclusivity and faithfulness, a marriage tie stronger than the parent-child relation, an ongoing erotic intimacy expressed sexually, love and respect between the partners, and the production of children, if God so blesses the union. Abstinence outside of marriage is expected of all.

Homosexual *practice* is consistently considered by Scripture as a form of sexual immorality. It is unequivocally rejected by revelation because it violates the gendered existence of males and females ordained by God at Creation. This ban is comprehensive (encompassing all forms), pervasive (existing in all parts of Scripture) and serious (leading to exclusion from God's coming Kingdom).

The second question to ask is how far what is said is true, in part and in the whole. This is one of the dividing points in this debate because many scholars on both sides agree that the biblical voices are consistently disapproving of homosexual practice. This agreement is strongest concerning the Creation stories and Paul's analysis in Romans 1. The attempts to reinterpret these texts as approving homosexuality have uniformly failed. What divides is whether the biblical viewpoint is true (this is disputed by some), whether the progress of tradition allows us to disagree with the biblical viewpoint (some believe in progressive revelation to the Church) and whether the biblical view applies to contemporary realities (some deny that it is relevant by claiming does not address orientation, deals only with exploitative or idolatrous homosexuality or does not deal with long-term, loving, monogamous homosexual bonding). To argue this point would be to extend this outline beyond reason. Instead I will state my own conclusion without argument.

Conclusion: For those who accept Scripture in part and in whole as God's written word, what Scripture says and means is taken as definitive and conclusive. It is God's infallible truth. Hence, the conclusions to the first question constitute the authoritative framing of any answer in principle and will serve as the basis for pastoral and practical response to the realities of sexual practices in our day.

The third question is “so what?” What significance does this truth, in all its forms as well as its central thrust, have to do with my life and my contemporary world? To engage this third task we ask a series of questions, specifically:

1. Is the issue a matter of significant concern in the Bible?

- a. *Is there a consistent perspective in the Bible?*
 - i. How often is the issue addressed?

Infrequently, but not as infrequently as many suggest (Direct—Genesis 9:20-27; 19:4-11; Judges 19:22-25; Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Ezekiel 16:50, 18:12; 33:26; Romans 1:26-27; I Corinthians 6:9; Jude 7; II Peter 2:7; homosexual cult prostitution—Deuteronomy 23:17-18; I Kings 14:24; 15:12; 22:46; II Kings 23:7; Job 36:14; Revelation 21:8; 22:15). In addition the Jerusalem decree (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25) follows the pattern of Leviticus 17-18, the only part of the law required of resident aliens. It appears to reference all the banned sexual practices of this part of the Torah by the term “sexual immorality” (*porneia*), requiring Gentile Christians to conform to its injunctions.
 - ii. If infrequently addressed, does infrequency imply insignificance or universal agreement?

It is due to virtual universal agreement within Israel and the Church, in contradistinction to their larger environments, which contained culturally legitimated homosexual practices. The contexts of discourse indicate the people of God are not to be conforming but reforming of their cultural surrounding on this issue (e.g., Leviticus 18:1-5, 24-30; 19:2; I Corinthians 5:1-2, 6:1-11).
 - iii. Is the issue a part of a much larger and more significant concern in the Bible?

It is embedded in the larger and pervasive theology of gender, sexuality and family. That theology is rooted in Creation but then witnessed to throughout Scripture. That witness is consistently pro-heterosexual, built on a clear norm—abstinence from sex outside marriage and faithfulness within marriage. Without exception marriage is legitimated only between males and females.
 - iv. Is it likely that any biblical writers might have held a different position?

There is no indication of any variance on the larger theology and ethics of sexuality when considering the question of heterosexuality and homosexuality. Biblical texts are uniformly negative when they deal with the question of homosexual practice.
 - v. What degree of continuity and consistency is there between the testaments?

Other than the New Testament’s additional explicit addressing of female same-sex intercourse, the same theology and ethics of sexuality is found in both testaments. This is true despite the fact that there are differing family and social structures to which theology and ethics are applied.
- b. *Is it a serious moral issue for biblical writers?*
 - i. Does violation lead to exclusion from the people or the Kingdom of God?

In both testaments the language surrounding direct comments on homosexual practice is profoundly severe. The Old Testament labels it an “abomination” (*toevah*), meaning something Yahweh hates. The consequence for it in Israel was death. In the New Testament such practice, not turned away from, means such persons do not “inherit the Kingdom of God.” (I Corinthians 6:10) Readers are urged not to deceive themselves on this. (I Corinthians 6:9)
 - ii. Do any biblical writers regard the issue as a matter of indifference?

There is no indication that biblical writers considered this *adiaphora* or a matter of indifference.
 - iii. Do biblical writers prioritize it (or the larger matter in which it is embedded) as one of the core values of the faith?

The central ethical paradigm in the Old Testament is focused on the family with core values of continuance of life, holding of land in stewardship and hospitality. The theology and ethics of sexuality are part of this paradigm. It is embedded in Creation as well as the celebration of hetero-erotic love in the Song of Songs. In the New Testament, marriage and family is relativized by the coming of the promised “seed” to redeem the world. Nevertheless, sexual purity and order remain central threads. Heterosexual immorality and homoerotic sex are “contrary to the sound teaching that conforms to the glorious Gospel of the blessed God...” (I Timothy 1:11)

2. Does the biblical witness remain valid in a contemporary setting?

- a. *Is the situation to which the Bible responds comparable to the contemporary situation?*

While there are clear cultural differences between the ancient Hebrew society, the agrarian Roman Empire with its province of Judea and contemporary modern industrial/post-industrial societies, the differences do not render the theology and ethics of sexuality irrelevant or invalid on this matter. Two areas are often held up as disqualifiers of biblical norms—that the biblical writers lived in a world unaware of non-exploitative, long term, loving homoerotic relations and that sexual orientation was not recognized in the ancient world. Both of these claims are false.

- i. Loving, compassionate homosexual relations are acknowledged by, among other texts, Plato's *Symposium* (cf. 178C-219D). For more a detailed argument see Mark Smith, "Ancient Bisexuality and the Interpretation of Roman 1:26-27" *Journal of Am. Acad. Of Religion* 64 (1996): 223-56; cf. James E. Miller rejoinder in *JAAAR*, 65 (1997): 861-66 and Smith's response, 867-70. As John Boswell argues, "Unfortunately, an equally distorting and even more seductive danger for the historian is posed by the tendency to exaggerate the differences between homosexuality in previous societies and modern ones." (*Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, p. 27)
 - ii. There are a number of Greco-Roman writers who recognize a type of constitutional homosexuality, though they did not use modern psychosexual categories (e.g., Plato's *Symposium*, 192E and 193D explain it mythologically). B.B. Brooten, *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (1996) and William R. Schoedel, "Same-Sex Eros: Paul and the Greco-Roman Tradition" in David Balch, *Homosexuality, Science, and the "Plain Sense" of Scripture* (2000), pp. 43-72, both of whom affirm homoeroticism, find the notion that the ancients did not recognize sexual orientation contrary to the evidence.
- b. *Are the arguments made by biblical writers still convincing?*
There are a number of arguments used by biblical writers. Most of them are clearly theological arguments, appealing to God as having given a divine perspective on the meaning and mode of good sex. The persuasiveness of those arguments largely rests on a person's theological understanding of the nature of revelation, inspiration, inscripturation¹⁴ and the transmission of the texts of Scripture. In addition, one's principles of interpretation affect the evaluation of the arguments of biblical writers. One striking element is that the arguments largely bypass the issue of causation. In the case of Paul, the argument is dependent upon the more or less "obvious" uses of the bodily orifices as a set of structures given at Creation that signal male-female complementarity. The meaning of this complementarity is accessible through reason and Scripture, leaving those who depart from it without excuse. Modern Christians may well use additional arguments without contradicting the Bible.
- c. *Has the church adopted a consistent and strong witness on this issue through the centuries and across traditions?*
Contrary to widespread arguments made popular by John Boswell, the Church has adopted a consistent and strong position that corresponds to the norm that sexual relations are legitimated only within the marriage of a man and a woman and that abstinence is expected outside of such a bond and faithfulness within it. This is true across all the contemporary seven major Church traditions. It was only in the second half of the 20th century that a small minority movement in Euro-American-based denominations began to seek change in this relatively uniform tradition.
- d. *Do new biological or socio-scientific insights or cultural changes invalidate the biblical witness?*
(How certain and well-grounded are these insights and changes? Do these new insights directly engage the arguments marshaled by biblical writers? Are the writers of biblical texts limited or blinded by their cultural horizon? Were there other perspectives or options available in the biblical writer's own time?) This is a central focus of the current controversies. Many approach this question convinced this is a matter to be settled by the witness of practicing homosexuals and science. Often it is on this basis that the traditional position and arguments of both Scripture and Church are summarily dismissed.
- i. The genetic evidence (X chromosome Xq28): The initial positive results have been shown to be flawed and as not establishing a genetic connection to homosexual orientation. Genetic influences on sexual practice are indirect and subject to significant interactions with the environment. They are considered at present to be only one of multiple factors that influence sexual behavior.¹⁵

¹⁴ "Inscripturation" is the process whereby the inspired writer wrote down or the editor edited the biblical materials so that they adequately represent what God sought to communicate by inspiring the law-giver, prophet, narrator etc.

¹⁵ G. Rice, et al., "Male Homosexuality: Absence of Linkage to Microsatellite Markers at Xq28." *Science* 284 [April 23, 1999]: 665-67.

- ii. Identical twin studies: Expectations are that a 100% shared genetic make up would mean, if genes are destiny, 100% concordance between such twins in sexual orientation. Three studies in the 1990s indicated a near 50% rate for identical twins and half that for non-identical twins. A fourth study found only one-half such rates. These four studies have been criticized for not being randomly selected, for confounding genes and environment (since the twins were raised in the same home), and for depending on inadequate samples. Studies seeking to overcome research design defects have either not been possible or indicate concordance rates that are significantly smaller than earlier studies with research design problems. Even this limited evidence indicates that genetics only contributes partially to a multifaceted causal nexus that leads to homosexuality.
- iii. Intrauterine hormonal studies: One hypothesis (joined with some studies on stress-induced differences or mothers who took female hormones during pregnancy) is that hormonal imbalances during fetal development is a causal factor in sexual orientation. The results are inconclusive.
- iv. Childhood gender non-conformity and socialization of children: Children who manifest high degrees of gender non-conformity show increased tendencies to affirm a homosexual identity as adults. The explanations for this vary, ranging from psychoanalytic, childhood sexual abuse to peer taunting and rejection. Environmental and reactive psychological factors appear to contribute to adult homosexual identity but the weight of such factors is unclear.
- v. Elasticity vs. fixed immutability of sexual orientation:
 1. Homosexuality is not an immutable, single matter into which people are born for a lifetime. The empirical evidence is that sexuality is significantly fluid, running on a continuum from exclusively heterosexual to exclusively homosexual. Many exclusive homosexuals come to the realization of their gender identity relatively late in life. Many who have lived as exclusive homosexuals subsequently become predominantly or exclusively heterosexual later in life. Several survey research results indicate sexual arousal and orgasm experienced through intercourse with a member of the opposite sex is reported by the majority all homosexuals. Both heterosexuals and homosexuals report shifts in sexual orientation on the Kinsey scale (a self-rating scale of sexual practice) during their life. All this evidence points to a degree of elasticity.
 2. Change: For a half century, prior to the redefinition of homosexuality by the American Psychological Association, clinical reports of sexual practice by homosexuals indicated an approximate 28-30% rate of change from homosexual to heterosexual practice and orientation.¹⁶ Such major change does not mean all homosexuals can and will change. It is evidence that the ideology of an innate, lifelong, immutable orientation has no basis in empirical fact for at least many self-identified homosexuals, nor is there scientific evidence that those who do not change are categorically different from those who do.
- vi. Cross-cultural evidence of variations in sexual practices: The difference between Hebrew culture and classical Greek culture is dramatic—in the one any homosexual expression was banned while in the other pederasty pervaded male society and was idealized at least among the upper status group. There are a number of cultures that require homosexual practices of their young. Ten to twenty percent of the societies of New Guinea institutionalize pederasty in varying ways (while in other New Guinea societies homosexual practice is found in only a small minority of men or is non-existent). Trans-generational (partners from different generations), trans-gendered (one partner takes on the gender of the opposite sex), class-structured (from different social statuses) and egalitarian homosexuality is found in widely divergent cultures and in socially constructed ways that suggest cultural norms are a major contributor to sexual practices. The power of social norms is clear, as David Greenberg summarizes, “Where social definitions of appropriate and inappropriate behavior are clear and consistent, with positive sanctions for conformity and negative ones for nonconformity, virtually everyone will conform irrespective of genetic inheritance and, to a considerable extent, irrespective of personal psychodynamics.”¹⁷ Variation in

¹⁶ Jeffrey Satinover, *Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth* [1996], p. 186, summarizes secular treatment studies with a composite result even higher—52% change in homosexuality that is “considerable” to “complete.”

¹⁷ *The Construction of Homosexuality* [1988] p. 487

urban vs. rural, educated vs. uneducated conditions in the United States: There are major differences in the rate of homosexuality by social location. A 1992 survey combined with data from the 1988 US General Social Survey indicates that while 2.8% of men identify themselves as homosexual, 9.2% of men in central city locations of the twelve major cities so identify. By contrast the rural rate was 1.3%. In the case of women, 2.6% of central cities of twelve major cities identify themselves as lesbian in contrast with 1.4% generally. In addition, there is a clear increase in homosexual identity with increases in education, especially college level and especially for women. Social context (especially urban for men; higher education for women) influences rates of homosexuality. While this fits well with cross-cultural evidence, there are problems of self-disclosure in all survey research that may well affect the rates reported.

- e. *Summary conclusions:* what empirical science exists on this matter indicates that homosexuality is *not* like left-handedness or color of eyes. It is the result of a multi-factored process that includes genetic, intrauterine, environmental, psychological and socio-cultural factors. Cross-cultural comparisons as well as current and past data indicate homosexuality is malleable, that sexual orientation is remarkably elastic and has potential for change. The more open and positive a culture is, the more incidence of homosexuality occurs. There are no critically established biological or socio-cultural findings that invalidate the biblical witness.
- f. *Does a new work of the Holy Spirit in the church justify changing the biblical position?*
 - i. While there are strong minority lobbies within a number of traditional Euro-American Christian denominations advocating a change in policy and practice concerning ordination of self-affirming, practicing homosexuals as well as sacralizing same-sex unions, these represent less than one-half of one percent of the world Christian movement.¹⁸ The larger body of Christ has not at present acknowledged this proposed change in biblical interpretation, theological argument and ethical guidance. While the Spirit leads us beyond the dictates of the teaching and law of Scripture, it does not routinely lead us to transgress its instruction, as this revisionist argument seeks to do.
 - ii. Does this alleged “new work” promote God’s Kingdom? There is no clear evidence that it does. It has created enormous controversy and division in major, old-line denominations in North American and Europe. So far it has not led to significant increases in mission.
 - iii. Does the change involve a total reversal of the biblical position or only a modification? The current change proposed is a total reversal of the biblical position, not a modification. It is also a reversal of the nearly universal understanding of sexuality by the major Church traditions. The reasons offered for such a dramatic change have neither good exegesis nor good science on their side. There is no clear indication from the sources of faith or reason that such a change is merited.
- g. *What do justice and love require?*
 - i. Does the biblical position run counter to the “weightier matters” of love and justice? The biblical position is not rooted in the desire to reinforce male dominance, so is not tied to this or any other unjust rationale. Its position is theological (revelation) as well as tied to the naturally occurring gendered bodily structures. Its justice orientation is to the requirements of the just Creator.
 - ii. One thing justice requires is that truth be spoken in love. Love requires compassion and mercy to those who are entangled, for whatever cause, in sinful patterns and habits. This includes reproving the sexual sins within the Church and larger culture (note the context of the second part of the great commandment—Leviticus 19:17-18). The biblical position seeks liberation from all forms and outcomes of sin, including the damaging health and societal impacts of sexual misconduct, whether heterosexual or homosexual. In the homosexual population in North America these patterns are marked—less than 2% monogamous relations, the majority of males with 50+ sexual partners (many reporting 500+ lifetime partners), a five to ten year decrease in life expectancy and significantly elevated risk factors for rectal cancer, bowel and other infectious diseases including AIDS, suicide and mental illness.

¹⁸ The World Christian Encyclopedia states that there are more than 37,000 denominations worldwide –and of them only about 7-10 denominations have adopted policies of ordaining self-affirming practicing homosexuals and marrying them with ecclesiastical rites. All are Euro-American. If we assume everyone in those denominations agrees with the official policy, then we have less than ½ of one percent of the World Christian Movement.

Conclusion: The nearly uniform ethics of the historic and contemporary Christian movement that disapproves homosexual practice remains relevant and important in the modern context. A contemporary ideology has often driven out good science and good theological exegesis so that this matter has become more confused and ambiguous than it is in reality. The just and loving thing to do within the Church is to proclaim the good news that God in Jesus Christ saves all of us by a transforming grace. It is a grace that enables heterosexuals, bisexuals and homosexuals to return to the original intention of gendered complementarity to be lived out in a community where all singles practice abstinence and where sexual intercourse is reserved to a man and woman bound in the covenant of marriage.

The fourth question is whether there is an accommodation (or “emergency order” or “interim ethic”) wherein a less-than-ideal “solution” to fallen sexuality should be recognized and practiced? Can we say that the biblical position stands, but the pastoral or “realistic” pattern of the Church ought to be to provide safe sanctuary for the minority of the homosexual population who seek (1) long-term, stable relationship and (2) affirmation of their Christian heritage and identity? Can the Church decry rampant promiscuity, exploitative sexuality of all sorts, yet approve and support monogamous, long-term homosexual unions? Can we seek an “optimum homosexual morality” as an accommodation?¹⁹

1. What is the meaning of “marriage?” Can homosexual “marriage” be analogous or equivalent to heterosexual marriage?

- a. Acts derive their meaning from the context in which they occur. The largest ethical context for marriage is the creational intention of the Creator. (Genesis 2:24) Sexual intercourse within marriage celebrates the life-long commitment of two partners to each other as well as the mutuality of that relationship. It is the definitive coming together of two persons as sexual beings into a one-flesh union (entailing more than simply sexual climax). It is a whole-bodied response that is open to the gift of new life in procreation, even while procreation does not exhaust the meaning of sexual intercourse. Same-sex intercourse, even in stable, long term relations, is deficient as a symbolic and enacted event of being one flesh. Such intercourse can only simulate the actuality of Creation’s design and cannot serve as procreative sex. Marriage requires more than “an-other” but one who is truly “other” in a sexually other, gendered being. Marriage is consistently portrayed in Scripture as between a man and a woman. This being of one flesh is at the heart of the ideal of marriage.
- b. Same-sex unions in the first century were sometimes formalized in marriages through wedding ceremonies. (Nero married once as the groom and once as a bride.) The New Testament could have affirmed “married” same-sex couples but does so nowhere. Current proposals can only show that stable, long term same-sex relations are “less bad” than the more normal promiscuity of the homosexual mainstream. They do not offer persuasive arguments that such sexuality fulfills the will of God in a less than ideal but not sinful manner (e.g., as polygamy or levirate marriage do).

2. Can homosexual sexual relations be considered a “right” or a “calling?”

- a. Does the Church add an unnecessary and unfair burden to those who experience themselves as homosexual by not affirming such sexual expression? Abstinent singleness or fidelity within heterosexual marriage is the patterned ethical standard of the Bible. Does this not violate the God-given right of *everyone* to sexual love and intimacy? No. Love is a relational reality, not a right. Sexual love requires a partner, a lover. No one can claim a personal right to sexual love or assume there is a lover that exists for everyone (who has a corresponding obligation to love sexually).
- b. Does the stance of the Church not make celibacy mandatory for homosexual persons since abstinence is neither freely chosen for life nor temporary until marriage? Abstinence in singleness is not a calling for some people but rather the ethical ideal and requirement for all singles. Unlike celibacy, which is a voluntary, semi- or permanent response to a call from God, abstinence is a commitment that is asked of all singles, however difficult that ideal is to embody. Sexual chastity is the calling to all Christians, and it expresses itself in different ways for singles and marrieds (who may abstain from sexual relations voluntarily or involuntarily). The fact that the burden of sexual holiness falls unevenly in a fallen world is a reality for all of us. God gives grace to all of us to enable us to live joyfully and obediently.

Conclusion: Much more needs to be said on this fourth question. While “covenanted” homosexuality is *ethically better* than “casual” homosexuality, it cannot be affirmed. To affirm it is to sanction behavior Scripture clearly and consistently says leads to exclusion from the coming Kingdom of God. Affirmation assumes that Christian faithfulness in abstinence is “too hard” and

¹⁹ See a longer addressing of this ethical question in David Fraser, “Focus on the ‘Biblical Family’” in J. Modica, *The Gospel with Extra Salt* [2000].

too high a standard. Obedience is difficult for us all. Grace is powerful; discipleship costly. We dare not offer “cheap grace” or pastoral solutions that open an escape from costly repentance, spiritual transformation and healing.

Definitions:

There is significant disagreement in the meaning and use of words.

- **Homosexual:** At the most basic, there is no agreement as to the meaning of “homosexual” since some claim such a “condition” does not exist but is only a matter of choice and is socially, not biologically, constructed. Empirically deciding whether a person is “homosexual” or not, even under assumptions that there are those who are constitutionally homosexual, is difficult. It cannot be measured objectively so is most frequently dependent upon self-reported accounts. Those who have been “exclusively homosexual” for some time who subsequently change to “exclusively heterosexual” are a case in point. Are they *essentially* heterosexuals, mistakenly trying to be homosexual for a time? Or, are sexual practice and feelings not stable, permanent actualities but elastic and changeable? Can we accurately speak only of practice, not essence? How are those who are “bisexual” to be classified? Here are some beginning points to start the search for clarity of language and speech on other definitions as well (as well as an attempt at a definition of “homosexual”).
- **Abstinence:** The restraining oneself from doing something. Sexual abstinence is the response to the requirement of God that we not engage in sexual acts when single. Married people practice abstinence voluntarily (for special religious reasons) or involuntarily (when life’s circumstances require it). Abstinence is the Christian ethical ideal for all people who are single, regardless of their “orientation.” It is not a calling for some but a requirement for all, whether voluntary or involuntary.
- **Celibacy:** The abstaining from marriage and sexual relations for religious reasons. It is the acceptance of a single state as a religious duty. This may be by vow or under some general obligation. It responds to the special calling of God that is given to only some people, chosen voluntarily as permanent or semi-permanent.
- **Chastity:** The preservation of sexual purity according to one’s state of life (virginity for the unmarried, sexual abstinence for the single, faithfulness to husband or wife in marriage). Violations of chastity include fornication (sexual relations between unmarried people), adultery (sexual relations with a partner to whom a married person is not married) and incest (sexual relations between people classed as being too closely related to marry each other). Sexual chastity is more than a physical ideal but is part of the larger “virtue” of love. It is an expression of respect for other human beings as made in the image of God and called to be God’s children as well as for one’s own gendered body, given by the Creator and redeemed by Christ.
- **Heterosexism:** The claim of discrimination or prejudice against homosexuals on the assumption that heterosexuality is the norm.
- **Homophobia:** Originally this meant an extreme, irrational fear or hatred of homosexuals and homosexuality. It has come to be used by some to refer to any belief that values heterosexuality above homosexuality or claims that heterosexuality is more natural or normal to our human nature than homosexuality. In this latter use, it is a pejorative dismissal of those who disagree with the homosexual viewpoint and practice by seeking to label them as believing and behaving irrationally due to fear of same-gendered sexuality and behavior.
- **Homosexual:** One who sustains “a predominant, persistent, and exclusive psychosexual attraction toward members of the same-sex....feels sexual desire for and a sexual responsiveness to persons of the same sex and who seeks or would like to seek actual sexual fulfillment of this desire by sexual acts with a person of the same sex.” (*Encyclopedia of Bioethics*, ed. Warren T. Reich, 2:671).

Select Recent Bibliography and Resources as Starting Points:

For a quick, clear, even-handed and non-technical overview of the “Christian” options in this debate:

- L. R. Holben, *What Christians Think about Homosexuality: Six Representative Views* (N. Richland Hills, TX: BIBAL Press, 1999)

More scholarly accounts that give some of the major positions and arguments can be found in:

Ethical Reasoning: Unit 8 - How Do We Live Ethically In Our Relationships?

- *The Christian Scholar's Review*, Theme Issue: Christianity and Homosexuality, XXVI:4(Summer 1997)
- David L. Balch, ed., *Homosexuality, Science, and the "Plain Sense" of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

Some contrasting stories of Gay Christians:

- Mel White, *Stranger at the Gate: To Be Gay and Christian in America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994)
- John Paulk, *Not Afraid to Change: The Remarkable Story of How One Man Overcame Homosexuality* (Wine Press Publishers, 1998)

From authors who conclude homosexual practice cannot be reconciled with biblical and Christian ethics:

- Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001)
- Stanley J. Grenz, *Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998)
- Stanton Jones and Mark Yarhouse, *Homosexuality: The Use of Scientific Research* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000)
- Thomas E. Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow? Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate* (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 1995)
- Marion L. Soards, *Scripture and Homosexuality: Biblical Authority and the Church Today* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995)
- Ronald M. Springett, *Homosexuality in History and the Scriptures: Some Historical and Biblical Perspectives on Homosexuality* (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Research Institute, 1988)
- Donald Wold, *Out of Order: Homosexuality in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998)

From authors who advocate reconciliation between homosexual practice and Christian faith:

- John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the 14th Century* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1980)
- Bernadette J. Brooten, *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1996)
- L. William Countryman, *Dirt, Greed, and Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and Their Implications for Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988)
- George R. Edwards, *Gay/Lesbian Liberation: A Biblical Perspective* (New York: Pilgrim, 1984)
- Martti Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998)
- Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality: Contextual Background for Contemporary Debate* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983)

For principles of interpretation for determining the applicability of biblical texts on homosexuality to today:

- William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001)

Additional helpful works:

- David F. Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1988)
- Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: Harper, 1996)
- Jeffrey Satinover, *Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996)
- Christopher Wolfe, ed., *Homosexuality and American Public Life* (Dallas: Spence Publishing, 1999)

Ministry to Homosexuals: See www.exodusnorthamerica.org

Ethics for Living and Leading

Unit 9

Ethics and Culture: What's the Difference?



Development Associates International

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Unit 9: Ethics and Culture: What's the Difference? (We need good hermeneutics and careful reading of the Bible)

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Learning Outcomes:

At the end of this unit you will be able to:

- State clearly the importance of taking culture into account in thinking ethically;
- Use the pilgrim and missionary principles in decisions about the validity of given cultural practices for Christians;
- List several key principles that enable us to sort what is cultural in the Bible from what are culturally limited applications;
- Understand and use the tether model and the starting point plus model for thinking about cultural practices and Christian standards.

Steps to Complete Unit 9

Read and Respond

Readings are included at the end of most units. These texts provide biblical and cultural framework for an adequate understanding of Christian ethics. Please reflect and respond as indicated in assignments found within the texts.

Supplementary text: John R. W. Stott, Issues Facing Christians Today, 4th Edition (Zondervan 2006). For Unit 9, please read Stott, pp. 419-442 The New Biotechnology; 443-482 Same-Sex Relationships.

Lecture Notes & Workbook

Overview

We have come a great distance in our journey into Christian ethics. The deeper we go, the more we realize that the issues we once thought were fairly straightforward and simple no longer look that way. To deal with the full range of ethical issues that face us, we begin to suspect we have not been as careful interpreters of the Bible as we ought to have been. Somehow cultural differences and assumptions as well as critical details of situations complicate “settling” ethical issues.

Perhaps one way we can dramatize this is remembering that Babel comes after the Garden of Eden in the storyline of the Bible. We need to remember the first major event in ethical history—the taking of the fruit of the “knowledge of good and evil” as the original act of disobedience. The outcome was ethical and moral confusion. Instead of clear “knowledge” of good and evil, the fruit brought “death.” We were distanced from our original place and calling, from the Creator and from that immediate and comfortable relationship with God in the garden. Evil became a dramatic and inevitable accompaniment of our life and endeavor.

Babel (Genesis 11) also is a significant event in ethical history. It is the story of God confusing the human “word.” The process of language difference was set afoot. We live in a world with over 12,000 human languages now. Those languages often also mark cultural boundaries. Different languages and cultures contain different ways humans have organized living, created values and instituted unique ways of doing things.

When we come to “settle” ethical issues, we find we have to come to terms not simply with biblical or Christian convictions. Language and cultural differences make a real difference in ethics. What we discover is that our “settled convictions” don’t seem to work well across all time and cultures. Why is that? What is it that we have not included in our thinking that means what we often think are “universal” solutions to ethical and moral issues turn out not to be universal but culturally limited applications?

Culture is written into the texts of the Bible in important ways. The Bible is written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Koine Greek. The lives of the people described include customs and practices that are very different from how contemporary cultures think about or even handle similar matters (think of the purity regulations of the Old Testament; the ban on giving interest-bearing loans; the practice of levirate marriage or the kinsman-redeemer to provide long term security for young widows; the use of slaves in households). The list of customs and practices found in the Bible that seem alien and strange to us is a long one. Nevertheless, we do not think of the Bible as irrelevant.

In addition, it is clear that God spoke to people and called them to follow God within their own cultures. God did not give them a new language, a new social structure, a new family and kinship system or a “divine” political arrangement. Rather, God was willing to start with the family of Abraham as and where it was, and to deal with the people of Israel in terms of the economics possible and practiced in Palestine. The interaction between God and the people we meet in the Bible is thoroughly cultural. Even the sorts of writings we inherit as the Bible are written in the genres and common cultural patterns of their day (whether poetry, narrative, instruction, letters, biographies or histories).

The ethical instruction and decisions expressed in commands or models come clothed in the cultural practices of their day. All the communication we have in the Bible comes incarnated in the language and culture of its day. How do we find what is enduring and relevant for us in these ancient communications? What is culturally limited and designed for ancient saints only, and what is transcultural and meant to equip modern saints? How do we tell the difference between the two in the biblical materials?

That is the agenda for this unit: *what difference do the differences of culture make in learning to live and lead ethically?* Somehow we must negotiate the differences all of us have from the cultures we see being practiced in the Bible as well as discern fairly and faithfully what God tells us to do in our own modern cultures. This is not a new problem in the Christian tradition. Christians through the centuries and through the crossing of the Gospel across many languages and cultures have wrestled with this challenge.

In seeking to understand this challenge and give a response to it, we will use tools from several disciplines, not only biblical interpretation and theological reflection but also the social sciences. Before we do, the following exercise will help you sense some of the issues involved in ethics and culture.

Different Views of Marriage and Sexual Practices

Below is a list of practices, some found in the Bible, some found outside the Bible (with room for you to add some that might be more important and characteristic in your own context). You are asked to evaluate each practice or condition of life in terms of how you and/or your church community views that practice. If you see a practice you don’t understand, you might want to look it up. At this point we are not asking you to state the reasons why it might be considered an ideal, right, wrong, or neither right nor wrong matter. Just evaluate.

Ethical Reasoning: Unit 9 - Ethics and Culture: What's the Difference?

Consider the following list of structures, practices, norms, and ideals that surround family and sexuality and see how you would classify them (many of these are drawn from the Bible as well as contemporary cultures):

Scale: 1= Ideal; 2= Right; 3= Neither right nor wrong; 4= Wrong.

<i>Married with children</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Married by a civil authority</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Selling pornography</i> <input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Marriage to one's cousin</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Married to uncle or aunt</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Female prostitution</i> <input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Married without children</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Sex with a parent</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Male prostitution</i> <input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Married: different castes</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Levirate marriage</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Sex with a prostitute</i> <input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Married: different ethnic groups</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Keeping concubines</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Sex with animals</i> <input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Child marriage</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Divorced</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Being single</i> <input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Sexless marriage</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Divorced and remarried</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Bisexuality</i> <input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Same-sex sex</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Unmarried living together</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Transgendered sexuality</i> <input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Same-sex civil union</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Lust</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Eunuchs</i> <input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Same-sex marriage</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Masturbation</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Harems</i> <input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Married but separated</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Fornication</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Bride wealth</i> <input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Married to many spouses</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Adultery</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Dowry</i> <input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Married to sister/brother</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Forcible sex</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Cross-dressing</i> <input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Sex with a sister/brother</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Fantasizing about sex</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>(Add your own items)</i>
<i>Love marriage</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Viewing pornography</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	_____ <input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Arranged marriage</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Producing pornography</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	_____ <input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Married in a church</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Starring in pornography</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	_____ <input type="checkbox"/>

Now you might want to collect these three lists on a separate piece of paper under each of the headings: ideal, right, wrong, neither right nor wrong. When you look at these practices and where you have located them, you need to ask yourself—why is this practice categorized this way? What is it about it that makes it the “ideal” or “wrong” or however you have classified it? You might want to compare your lists with several of your fellow students to see where you agree and disagree and determine whether you can see why.

Think About It

Answer Box # 1

1. Looking at your lists and things in the different categories, how confident are you that you have things ethically “classified” accurately? Were there practices or realities with which you struggled in terms of what to make of them?
2. Which of the above did you list as “neither right nor wrong?” What are matters not of morals/ethics but perhaps taste or culture? What seems to be the principle or basis upon which they are not listed as “moral” matters?

I. Culture and Moral Values

We all have a sense that there are things that are neither right nor wrong. They are simply different ways of doing something. Language itself is a clear example of difference that has nothing to do with right or wrong. We cannot say of any language, whether Hindi or Swahili or Mandarin or Spanish or Arabic, *this one* is a morally superior language. It makes nonsense of what we mean by "moral" and makes a major mistake about language.

Neither is there some intrinsic connection between calling a place constructed for living a "house" as opposed to maison, منزل, māja, 房子, मकान, ngòi nhà, дом, תּוֹבָה, or casa. These are simply different ways of naming the world we experience. They are not right or wrong, but simply useful, shared ways of communicating about common realities we share, and neither are the orthographies used to represent words (lexemes) in writing—we've used six orthographies above—right or wrong. They are simply different schemes created by cultures to facilitate written expressions of spoken languages. Each orthography has both advantages and disadvantages, but they do not fit on a moral scale.

However, it is clear that the matters listed above that deal with family, marriage, kinship and sexuality have moral facets. Many of them can be put onto a scale that includes a moral evaluation as well as a cultural location. A number of the practices listed above are not practiced by any Jewish or Christian modern group, even though they are mentioned and exemplified in some biblical texts. We might evaluate them knowing that we are looking at a custom once practiced but now given up in human history. More important are many modern customs now practiced but not mentioned in the Bible. How do we evaluate them?

What we want to do first is to examine the Bible to see what we learn about God and culture there. It should help in giving us a larger framework within which we can then draw some conclusions about ethics and culture.

A. Like No Other Nation on Earth

We begin with the recognition that God made humans as cultural creatures. It is part of God's image that humans are creative in unfolding the possibilities built into the Creation they steward. Culture in that sense is a capability built into humans by God—a gift to humans that enables them to be the stewards of Creation and worshipers of God in a distinctly different way from all other earthly creatures. They create their variant cultures by devising languages so as to cooperate as well as to categorize and organize the natural and artistic worlds. Culture is an expression of God's diversity in created-by-God humanity which we have both developed and corrupted. We shall look at how God relates to human culture as God works out God's redemption.

Israel Called and Chosen

Let's start at a point of agreement among Christians. Israel was a people called and chosen by God. "For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession." (Deuteronomy 7:6)

This special relationship began with the calling of Abraham from Haran. (Genesis 12:1; Nehemiah 9:7) The liberation of Israel from Egyptian slavery affirmed God's covenant with the patriarchs. Mt. Sinai formalized that distinct bond between God and the people of Israel. Israel was to be a nation with a special relationship with God. God would be uniquely identified with Israel. Here the revelation of God would be given in a special way. (Romans 9:5)

Yet, this special connectedness placed covenant responsibilities upon Israel and gave it a worldwide mission. Israel was to purify itself of all false religion. There were to be no other gods worshipped alongside Yahweh. Israel was to purify itself of socially oppressive and unjust patterns. Neighbors were to be loved, not neglected, ignored or exploited. Justice and righteousness were to be clearly visible in the architecture of its social, economic and political life. God associated God's name with this people above all other peoples. In turn, they must associate their ways of living and thinking with the character of the God they served.¹

Yahweh is God of all the earth, not just Israel. (Exodus 19:5-6) In choosing Israel, God's purpose was to display God's glory and spread God's knowledge to all peoples through this one people. (Isaiah 11:9-10) Isaiah 44 is an oracle concerning Israel as Yahweh's chosen (vs.1, 21), unveiling Yahweh's claim as the one true God. Israel is called as a nation for the sake of the whole earth. Isaiah 45, with its profound argument for monotheism, provides the theological reasons for that calling.

There is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but me. Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn...Before me every knee will bow; by me

¹John Bright, *The Kingdom of God* (Abingdon Press, 1956).

every tongue will swear. They will say of me, "In the LORD alone are righteousness and strength." (vs. 21-24)

Israel's worldwide mission was to serve as priest to the other peoples of the earth. It was to mediate the knowledge and blessings of Yahweh to all other nations. The Israelite priests and Levites mediated that knowledge to the chosen people of God. The chosen people of God were in turn to do the same for the world. They were to reflect the glory of God by exhibiting appropriate connectedness to God, to fellow Israelites, to strangers and resident aliens, and to the land. The spiritual, ethical and moral quality of their life would recommend to other peoples the God to whom they belonged.

This special calling did not come to them on the basis of race, culture, social structure, population size or pre-existent righteousness. It was free and redeeming grace. This calling and choosing did not mean every Israelite trusted in Yahweh or properly served God. Disobedience is a persistent thread that runs through the history of Israel. Moses and the prophets issued clear warnings about the consequences of false religion and socially oppressive patterns. Disobedience to the ways of Yahweh led again and again to judgment. (Amos 3:2) Yet, always there was a faithful remnant in the midst of Israel.

The active element in the relationship was not ethnicity or genealogical purity. It was faith. Even individuals (e.g., Melchizedek, Rahab, Ruth, Naaman king of Aram) and peoples who were not within the kinship web of Israel (such as the Ninevites in Jonah) could enter into the blessings of Yahweh. In fact, the Old Testament foreshadows the incorporation of all non-Jewish peoples into the covenant and blessings of Abraham and Israel. (Psalm 87) Nevertheless, the primary focus of the Old Testament is establishing a people separated unto Yahweh and righteous in their social patterns. (Psalm 87)

Israel, a holy people

Close examination of Israel's existence reveals a civilization snugly fitting its historical and cultural context. God did not create a culture for the Israelites any more than God gave them a divine language in which to converse with God and each other. God chose a people who already possessed patterns of family life, techniques for producing and distributing goods, language, kinship and even religious ideas and ritual.

Careful study suggests the normative framework given by God in the narratives and law codes ("the Torah") *regularized* and *regulated* that pre-existing cultural substratum. The Old Testament's most stringent and penetrating regulation was of religious ideas and practices with their implications for connections between human beings. The giving of the law at Mt. Sinai came in the wake of the Exodus, liberating Israel from slavery. The law incorporated forms of life reflecting the character of that deliverance and enabling Israel to remember it. (Exodus 12) The law allowed Israel to respond to God's covenant. It dictated acknowledgement that all of their life, including social arrangements, was under the commanding presence of the God who delivered them. (Deuteronomy 6:5)

In the Torah's regulation of horizontal social relationships, the pattern appears to involve the softening of the harshness of customary practices of the day.² Examples of this include giving rights to slaves and restricting the power of masters³ and taking some first steps toward raising women's dignity.⁴ The Mosaic law resisted the contemporary severity of punishment by insisting punishments fit the gravity of the crime, for example, "an eye for an eye." (Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20) This "eye for an eye" was not mandating violence in return for violence. In its context, it was limiting punishment to no more than the original harm being rectified. You could not take two eyes for one eye or a life for a stolen cow. In general, it aimed at protecting the "small ones" whose position in society made them vulnerable or helpless. (Deuteronomy 10:17, 18; 15:7-11) It also provided conventions that appear oriented toward keeping Israel culturally distinct amidst its neighbors. (e.g., Leviticus 19:19)

Certain social structures insured the cyclical leveling of wealth and power differentials in an agrarian-based civilization. The sabbatical year (every seventh year) rested the land and the worker. What the land produced naturally that year was for the poor *and* for the wild animals.⁵ It also provided for slave-release, debt forgiveness and the special reading of the Torah. (Leviticus 25:1-7; Deuteronomy 15:1-18, 31:10f) The year of Jubilee, the fiftieth year in a cycle of seven sabbaticals, was a year of liberty throughout the land. (Leviticus 25:8-55) Real property sold during that half-century reverted to the original family (clan). Those whose poverty led them to sell themselves into indentured service were released

²Willard M. Swartley, *Slavery Sabbath War and Women* (Herald Press, 1983) deals with the hermeneutics of some of these issues. A comparison of Old Testament law with the Laws of Eshnunna (Akkadian law code from 1800 B.C.) and the Law Code of Hammurabi (Babylonian code dated at 1726 B.C.) shows significant advances. See Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Zondervan, 1982), pp. 143-44 and Christopher J.H. Wright, *An Eye for An Eye: The Place of Old Testament Ethics Today* (InterVarsity Press, 1983).

³Leviticus 25:42f, 46, 53; Exodus 12:44; 20:10; 21-23; Deuteronomy 15:13ff, 16:11-14, 23:15f.

⁴Genesis 2:23-24; Exodus 21:7-11; Deuteronomy 21:10-17, 22:28f; 24:1-4; cf. Proverbs 5:15-20; 18:22, 31:10-31; Malachi 2:13-16.

⁵Exodus 23:10; cf. Deuteronomy 25:4, Proverbs 12:10, Jonah 4:11 indicating humane concern for animals as a mark of a society pleasing to God.

without qualifications. It meant a fresh start economically for all who had fallen down from self-sufficiency into poverty.

These patterns indicate that God met the Israelites as and where they existed. God did not completely revolutionize their cultural patterns. Rather *God commanded patterns for living which would reform pre-existing cultural patterns*. The new norms connected their culture with God's character, purpose and liberating deliverance from the social oppression of Egypt. As God cared for them in slavery in Egypt, they were to care for the "least of these." (Matthew 25:45) The legitimacy of their shared social patterns hung on the degree to which they mirrored and institutionalized relational patterns intrinsic to God's covenant relationship with God's people.

Think About It

Answer Box # 2

1. What do you think about the following proposed model: culture is regulated, though not directly created by God? Do you see that as the major pattern as God deals with Abraham's family and then the nation of Israel?
2. What other patterns do you see present in God relating to human culture?

B. A New People of God with Many Cultural Expressions

The New Testament provides the definitive clue that the cultural and social specifics of Israelite existence are not mandates required for all peoples and cultures. The sociological structure of the people of God shifts from a single national group with ethnic boundaries to a Church encompassing many peoples and ethnic groups. This generated many tensions. The early Church had sharp debates over whether Christians from non-Jewish backgrounds must conform to Old Testament laws followed by Jewish people. The answer was a decisive "no." (Galatians; Acts 15)

Paul sharply focused the religious "indifference" of culture and social status within the people of God. No cultural or social distinctive prevents people from being fully a part of the body of Christ.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Galatians 3:28-29; cf. I Corinthians 9; Romans 14)

a. Culture regulation in the New Testament

God's Torah was not fundamentally culture-destructive or culture-creative. Rather it was *culture-regulative* of the ancient patterns brought by Abraham's family and the Israelites when called and chosen for covenant connectedness. The New Testament displays a similar relationship between God's revelation and action and human culture. The vast majority of Mosaic laws, given to regulate Israelite culture, were not forced on Gentile Christians. Gentile peoples brought their own cultural biases and patterns with them into the Church. However, Gentile customs came under the same sort of regulation. Some parts of the Mosaic law were retained (see Acts 15) and nine of the Ten Commandments were reiterated as "universal" for Jew and Gentile alike. The Gospel challenged and modified gentile customs in directions that reflected the implications of the liberating redemption provided by Jesus Christ. The New Testament never required a single, uniform culture among Christians, only life-styles congruent with the nature and meaning of Christ.

The "household codes" of the Apostolic letters are good examples of regulating pre-existent cultural patterns.⁶ These codes, modeled on Stoic and Jewish patterns, were Christian standards for relationships that pre-existed faith. Such codes typically involved lists of vices and virtues. They appealed to the various actors of the Roman extended household to fulfill the duties of their role relationships in a particular manner. Peter and Paul seek to Christianize the codes by connecting them to the story of Christ and the standards of God's moral nature.

⁶Colossians 3:18-4:1; Ephesians 5:21-6:9; I Peter 2:13-3:7.

In Ephesians 5:21-6:9, Paul is not instituting a "Christian culture" for the Ephesians. When they came to faith, they already lived in households with the power one-sidedly vested in the male *pater familias* (the husband-father-master). It was a patriarchal structure with rights of exposing unwanted children (and so letting them die), abusing wives and maiming and even killing slaves. These rights were vested by laws and regulations of the Roman Empire as well as by the customs of the community.

The weaker members of the household had little recourse when mistreated by the *pater familias*. Recognizing this, Paul takes the three central family role-sets and connects each to Christ. In every case he is placing limits on the powerful member and requiring that the roles be played out with Christ as the motivating image and presence. What is legal or simply lawful is not enough. Each member of the household needs to consider how Christ now changes the role relationship, the attitudes by which they live out their roles and the dignity with which they treat the other member of the role set (whether husband-wife, parent-child or master-slave).

The *pater familias* no longer can see himself as absolute master of his house. The key theme of the Ephesian household code is submission. Its broadest note is reciprocity: "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." (Ephesians 5:21)⁷ In relationship to the wife, the emphasis is on the *pater familias* enacting his role in a manner similar to the way Christ connects himself to the Church. The *pater familias* is to be one who loves his wife as his own body and gives himself sacrificially for her. Her readiness to renounce her own preferences is met with a husband who is equally ready to renounce his own interests and comfort for her.

In similar manner we find the one-sidedness of parental authority in the Roman household connected to the Lord. Children are to obey parents "in the Lord." Fathers are not to exasperate and provoke the anger of their children. They are to do whatever will train them to obey the Lord and understand the Lord's instructions for life. The boundaries of a child's obedience are what the Lord requires. It is the life in submission to Christ that provides justifiable restrictions on the control of the *pater familias*. Christ's love and blessing of children, if taken as a role model, would transform the harshness that could contaminate this role set.

Most startling are the words on slavery. The Christian slave is instructed to serve as though the master were Christ himself, with no hypocrisy, no slacking off and no resentment. The Christian master is to treat the slave with the same respect and sincerity he expects to receive from the slave. No threats are permitted. The reality is that *both* slave and master are enslaved to Christ as their common master. *Both* will receive rewards from him without favoritism. Christ as Master becomes the model for the human master-slave role relationship.

Without directly challenging the actual Roman social structure, Paul connects its role-enactment with Christ. He insists that Christians cannot simply continue life as if their faith commitment makes no difference in their attitudes and behavior. Paul is not saying to Christians that slavery is a good idea and we ought to institute it in our midst. Nor is he saying patriarchal family structures are God's patterns, so continue buttressing the authority and power of the male husband and father. Rather, Christians living in a social structure with slave-holding and patriarchy as integral institutions are to connect their own life in those structures to Christ.

In this case it meant placing sharp limits on the power and authority of the *pater familias*. Following Paul's household code would curb his abuses (and the abuses done by the weaker role partner). It would bring the actually enacted roles more into line with the liberating intentions and meanings of Jesus Christ. Culture and social status may be religiously indifferent, but the meanings and enactment of roles are not. The way people are treated, with the care, respect and dignity due to those to who bear the image of God, is not a matter of indifference. Roles and structures which violate human dignity must be transformed and will be transformed when connected to the model and power of Christ. Other cultural contexts might require transformations of very different sorts. Connecting each to the person and character of Christ is the essential element.

⁷*hypotásson* (to submit) in the middle or passive voice, as here, refers to the subordination of free agents. It denotes "a voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden." Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Translation and Commentary on Chapters 4-6* (Doubleday, 1974), p. 710. Contrary to common perceptions, the Bible nowhere uses the terminology of obedience (*hypakouo*) for a wife's relationship to husband as it does of children and parents or slaves and masters, or the Christian's obedience to Christ and the Christian faith.

Think About It

Answer Box # 3

Write a "household code" for your own cultural context. Knowing the people are who are most often found in a fully developed household (elderly parents, husband-wife, unmarried children, aunts/uncles, servants, adopted children etc.), how would you write a code of conduct for the various members of that household in terms of how they might need to act toward each other if Christ is the center of the household? What are the strengths and the abuses of that household system?

b. The Pilgrim and Missionary Principles

At work in this pattern of cultural-regulation in both the Old and New Testaments are two complementary principles. On the one hand, the people of God are pilgrims in every cultural group. This age is not their home. No particular social or cultural context is the Kingdom of God. The political and economic order in which the people of God live is not God's order in any direct sense. Their citizenship is in heaven, in the age to come. Therefore, they are permanent strangers, "resident aliens" in their native societies. Thus, Christians are necessarily critical, necessarily half-hearted patriots, necessarily unable to give full allegiance to any particular social structure or cultural pattern. They can move across cultural and social boundaries without the loss of their essential identity. They are pilgrims on earth.

Nevertheless, their calling requires them to identify with the culture and society within which they live. Their task is missionary in whatever culture they find themselves. They are to contextualize the Gospel, incarnating it within all peoples and all cultures.⁸ Yet, they must not domesticate it by subordinating the Gospel to the elements of any culture. When domestication happens, the meanings of the Gospel are compromised. People then encounter a picture of Jesus and the Kingdom of God contrary and alien to the Bible. The controlling meanings become those of the culture in places where the culture needs to be challenged. Instead, the domesticated Gospel reinforces the cultural patterns. The culture transforms the Gospel rather than the Gospel transforming the culture. They are missionaries and therefore retain their identities as citizens of the Kingdom of God while adopting and valuing the distinctive culture in which they live and whose people they wish to bring to Christ. Listen to Paul's own practice in I Corinthians 9:19-23.

Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. *I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.* I do all this for the sake of the Gospel, that I may share in its blessings. (emphasis added)

⁸To contextualize is to transfer and translate one understanding or cultural trait to a new context. In this case we take the meanings and messages of the biblical text and transfer them to social and cultural contexts with very different symbolic universes than those found in the Bible. Successful contextualization happens when, in the new context, the understandings and traits acquire meanings and functions roughly similar to those they had in their original context.

Contextualization without domestication happens by carefully following the story of what God has done for God's people throughout history as recorded in Scripture. It also requires a deep understanding of the powerful elements of the culture into which the Gospel is to be contextualized. Recitation of the biblical story as a story for that context and identification of that society and its structures with the God who freed the Israelites from slavery as well as with Jesus Christ who gave himself on the cross, provide resources for connecting that culture's own life-ways with the regulating *and* transforming effects of the Gospel. Often the regulating or modifying of cultural patterns in a Christ-centered way has a long-term transformative effect (as did the modifications early Christians followed in master-slave relationships).

Christians indwell both their culture *and* the Christian faith tradition. Together, with the help of the Spirit, each Christian community develops its own "household codes," "organizational mandates" and "cultural ethos." Through these codes, mandates and ethos, Christians spell out ways to regulate and transform their culturally given roles and explicitly connect culture to Christ. The result is not a single Christian culture. The vision is tens of thousands of human cultures, purified and enriched by the Gospel and a redemptive community in the midst of those cultures.

The cultural freedom offered to Christian community is thus tied to a particular mission, a mission that continues the calling of Israel. The purpose of the cultural freedom of the Christian is to mediate the blessing of God in Jesus Christ to all peoples of the earth. God's selection of Israel now reaches its penultimate stage in the Church. The Christian community is to carry the good news of the Kingdom of God in Jesus Christ to all nations (peoples). In every people there is to be a community of believers who call upon the name of the Lord, and this happens without the sacrifice of the richness and beauty of each culture.

There will be an authentically Chinese, Uzbekistani, Indian, Romanian, Mam, French, Iranian and American Christianity. Contextualization means the Gospel will speak within and to each culture through that culture's own communication pools, yet it will not be a domesticated Gospel, compromised and truncated by contextualization. God's own liberating voice will call elements of every culture into question.

The New Testament challenges Roman and Jewish practices and thought through both *looking back* to Israel) and *looking forward* to the coming Kingdom of God). Some passages evaluate the contemporary institutions and social practices of the first century in terms of permanent, universal principles embedded in the Old Testament. These passages look back to standards already revealed. When asked about the issue of divorce, Jesus recalls the Creation account as a way of understanding the force of the Mosaic law (Matthew 19:1-12) and its scope of application. Jesus appeals to the ideal in order to (1) correct contemporary bad practices in divorce and (2) understand the limited accommodation of the Mosaic law of divorce (given because of the practical reality of the hardness of hearts of people who are engaged in marital warfare and will not receive the ideal solution).

Other passages relativize a cultural practice by relating it to the coming age of the Kingdom of God. When asked a trick question about the resurrection, Jesus says the whole institution of marriage will not be a part of social life in the coming Kingdom. (Matthew 22:23-32) This fact of faith becomes a crucial element in a new view of marriage and fertility. Jesus is the fulfillment of the hoped for Abrahamic seed who would redeem Israel. The customs of marriage and childbearing cease with the coming age. Hence, they have a new meaning in the part of redemptive history identified with the Church.

The Old Testament has no word for bachelor. An unmarried or barren woman considered her life a disaster (as cursed). By contrast, in the New Testament Paul declares the practical superiority of a single life. (I Corinthians 7:8-9, 27, 29, 32-35) No longer is marriage and childbearing the same driving concern it was in Israel. The Child who redeems us has come. With the beginnings of the new age in him, marriage and childbearing cease to have the cultural or religious significance they had in the Old Testament. Remaining permanently single and childless takes on a new value in the light of Christ (who himself was single and childless).

From both of these ways of evaluating customs (looking backward to Old Testament standards; looking forward to the ideals of the coming Kingdom), we learn that the laws and commands given in Scripture serve higher ideals. We often encounter in specific texts of the Bible matters that are not God's "perfect" good will, but a measure adapted to serve a given time, culture and situation. These regulations or rules are not meant to indicate permanent, universal solutions to human conduct and relationships. They serve to regulate pre-existing patterns and to move them in the direction of the ideal (of Creation or Consummation).

Think About It

Answer Box # 4

1. Christ appealed to an original will of God or ideal when he placed limits on the Mosaic divorce law. Do you see the same sort of thing in an appeal to Creation in other areas of life to establish an ethical ideal?
2. What about ideals that come from the Consummation of all things in the coming Kingdom of God? Can you think of examples where the New Testament (or Old) appeals to the future perfect world in order to establish a central standard for a given slice of human life?

II. Languages and Peoples in Biblical Focus

Genesis 10:1-11:9 forms the heart of the Bible's account of human dispersion and diversity.⁹ It lays foundations for accepting the validity and dignity of every language and culture. It shows how biblical material, while overlapping with central concerns of sociology, handles them in a distinctly different fashion. We can divide the passage into two distinct sections, a genealogy and a judgment story.

A. *All Nations are Kin to Israel*

Genesis 10 is known as the "Table of Nations." It is a verbal map of the ancient peoples around Israel. Its literary form is an alliance or segmented genealogy, setting forth the general roots and affiliations of various ethnic-tribal groups. For Israel this was important information in forging confederations, handling intermarriages and setting boundaries. It helped them situate their own national identity in the midst of other nations. In its early history in Canaan, Israel was a peasant, agrarian, small-town nation. Kinship ordered the overwhelming majority of human connections.¹⁰ Kinship relatedness was crucial information for mobilizing social action and forging alliances.

This genealogy is unique in ancient literature in its assertion of the common source of all peoples and nations. The genealogy lists seventy descendants of Noah's three sons, tying them to various lands, languages and nations. The ultimate relationship of all humans to each other is that of brother and sister. All human beings are of common origin and thus of common dignity, whatever their differences. Any Israelite reciting this genealogy is forced to see the peoples surrounding them as distant kin. The genealogy offers no explanation why these groups dispersed, settled where they did or why their languages diverged. That is elucidated in the complementary judgment story of Babel. The Table of Nations simply sketches the web of connectedness between the ancestors of Israel and those of the nations and lands surrounding it.

There is a pattern in the account. The genealogy circles in on Israel's own roots by first listing nations stemming from Japheth. (Genesis 10:2-5) These are peoples least involved in Israel's destiny, located farther away than the others (in what is now Cyprus, Greece and Turkey). Next the genealogy lists nations from Ham. (10:6-20) Here are Israel's chief rivals—the Egyptians, Canaanites and Babylonians. We learn the story of the founding of Babel (Babylon) by the warrior and city builder, Nimrod. This begins the history of the city portrayed most consistently as an anti-God in biblical narratives. Finally, it recounts Israel's own roots in Shem. (10:21-32) Here we have many of Israel's allies as well as the enemy, Assyria, and Elam (one of Babylon's close rivals).

None of the peoples listed are more than 1500 miles from Canaan. They are all within the circumference of trade and travel of Israel. There is no indication that this list intends to be comprehensive. There is literary significance in listing seventy names. This number corresponds to the

⁹The following is indebted to Gordon Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis 1-15* (Word, 1987), Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of the Book of Genesis* (Baker Book House, 1988) and Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary* (Augsburg, Minneapolis, 1984).

¹⁰Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (University of California Press, 1982), pp. 88-100, describes typical features of kin-ordered modes of production. Norman Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of Religion of Liberated Israel 1250-1050 B.C.E.* (Orbis, 1979), Part VI develops a series of hypotheses about the social structural features of ancient Israel.

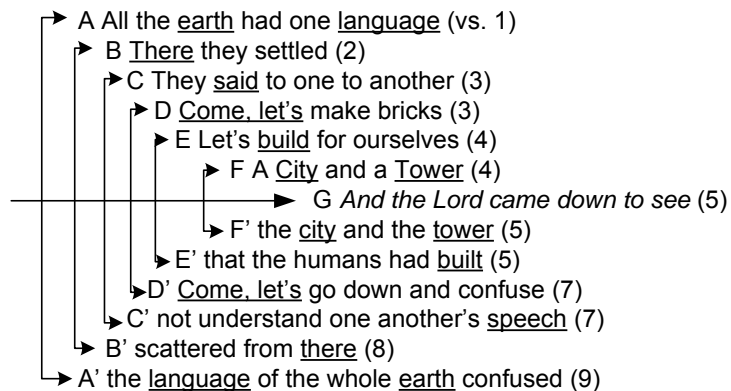
seventy who went with Jacob into captivity in Egypt. Jesus' ministry includes sending seventy out to evangelize. It is a symbol of his intention that the good news of the Kingdom is for all peoples. The point of Genesis 10 is that all the nations in their lands with their distinct languages, including Canaanite groups and eastern powers who one day will carry Israel into captivity, are one in origin. Israel is close or distant kin to *them all*.

This genealogy gives no indication of the various histories of inter-nation hostility recorded later. If this were the end of the story, one might imagine that all these peoples existed in their diversity as one happy, extended family, but the story does not end here. The narrator goes on to tell a complementary tale. That the Table of Nations and the judgment story of Babel are set side by side signifies they are complementary accounts of the dispersion and diversity of the peoples.

B. *The Theological Meaning of Language Diversity*

The story of Babel's judgment (Genesis 11:1-9) describes the intervention of God as the initiating cause of human linguistic divergence. That linguistic diversity underlies the scattering of the single human race into distinct peoples and nations. Several literary features give clues to the story's significance.

The story is arranged in a fashion that enhances memorization in a culture where the vast majority was not literate. It is a palistrophe or extended chiasmus in which each element of the front end of the story corresponds to a similar element in the second half of the story. The hinge on which the story turns is the coming down of Yahweh to inspect the Tower. The structure looks like this:



Another way of highlighting the movement of the story is to divide it into its two components, contrasting halves divided by the coming of Yahweh:

- Human deeds (A-F)
- Inspection of the tower and city (G)
- Divine deeds (F'-A')

The major points stand out when the content and structure of this story are set within the symbolic universe of Israel and the ancient Middle East. This is the last of a series of primeval stories. These stories deal with the whole of humanity and portray the spread of sin followed by the judgment of God. This is the only story in that series not followed by a sign of hope from God. Instead it moves quickly forward to tell the calling of Abraham and God's promises to bless all peoples through the one people of God. It says in effect, there is hope for a world divided by language. God is calling one people into being with a mission to mediate God's redemption and blessing to all peoples.

The name "Babel" is also a clue that the story is polemical. For the Babylonians, Babel meant "the gate of God." By contrast, the Hebrew narrator associates the name with the meaning "mixed up, confused." The Mesopotamian cities built tower-like structures, temples called ziggurats, as gateways going up to the heavens. Here is the premier original, the towering skyscraper of the ancients. The human motivation behind it is social immortality ("making a name") and technical prowess, unification of the finest human talent. The inhabitants seek to bypass the command of the Creator to disperse and fill the earth.

The story ridicules this technical achievement. Meant to reach up to God, the tower is so small that Yahweh and the hosts must descend the heights of heaven to see it. Yahweh concludes that this city-tower is the prelude to more serious sin. Yahweh decides to place limits on human abilities to unite in sin. The judgment that falls upon this effort commences processes separating people into different language pools. Their single language is confused. Families move off into separate linguistic and communication pools, yet this is not a hindrance to the worship of Yahweh. Nothing here is similar Islam's insistence on Arabic as the divine language, essential to understand God's word in the Quran. For Islam, the essential word of God is and must be in Arabic. By contrast, the Bible sees human linguistic diversity as rooted in the action and intentions of God. Hebrew and Greek are not sacred languages.

We must be careful in interpreting this story. Its literary construction as well as the sparseness of what it tells us should not tempt us to speculate over details not presented. The narrative does not present the instantaneous formation of new languages, but the confusion of the old. It is not offered as an alternative to synchronic studies of linguistic drift done by socio-linguistics. Such studies indicate the length of time and processes by which once-related dialects of the same language become two "different" languages. This story also does not assert an instantaneous scattering of the families throughout the earth. It connects linguistic diversity with the activity of God in human affairs. The purpose is to restrain evil that can come from the total unity of humanity.

Walter Brueggemann suggests the sort of significance residing in this story.¹¹ Unity is desired by the people as they resist God. They also fear scattering. Nonetheless, God scatters them as punishment for their use of unity in rebellion against God. However, there is a unity desired by God based on loyalty to God. A world ordered according to the goodness and joy for which the Creator brought it into being is at risk in human affairs. Accomplishing that order does not come by a self-securing homogeneous humanity, acting as though God is not the Lord. Neither can it come into being through a scattering of autonomous parts. God's order does not envisage peoples who act as though the separate parts of humanity do not belong to each other. In both unity and scattering lurk the possibilities of obedience and blessing or disobedience and curse.

Our world is one in which language is decisive. Speaking and listening are fundamental to true human community. The judgment of God is the historical cause of the pluralization experienced by the modern world. The Church as a sociological body is a new language community incorporating linguistic and the associated cultural diversity. In this community diverse humans can come back together into a proper unity based on loyalty to the Creator and Redeemer of all peoples. The sign of tongues on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) is an intimation that the Church is to be a multi-linguistic, multi-cultural community. As it looks forward, the New Testament envisions the coming Kingdom of God as incorporating this diversity.

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne...and they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." (Revelation 7:9-10)

The Kingdom of God does not remove the diversity of culture and historical experience. The coming age does not wipe the slate clean and start over. Rather "the kings of the earth will bring their splendor" into it and the "glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it." (Revelation 21:24, 26)

This position differs significantly from the attitude of Islam about its holy book, the Quran. For them the text of the revelation in Arabic is inseparable from its message. To recite the Quran and worship, every Muslim must learn Arabic. Where there are hundreds of translations of the Quran, they are all viewed as "interpretations" of the Quran which is untranslatable.

Think About It

Answer Box # 5

1. In what ways does the Christian view of culture and language differ from that of Islam? What effects has the view that the Koran is "untranslatable," that Arabic is the only language in which Allah's revelation can be rendered, had on Islam? What happens when we make one language "sacred"?
2. What problem do you see when Christians identify one translation or version of the Bible as "the" version (the way Catholics considered Latin for many centuries and some Protestants have done with the King James Bible)?

In summary, the Bible does not push a single culture or social structure forward as a "Christian culture." The linguistic and cultural diversity of earth is an essential part of this fallen age. That diversity expresses both the judgment of God on sin and a fulfillment of the command for humans to fill the earth. In the final age, linguistic and national diversity will be represented and preserved. The final unity of

¹¹ *Genesis* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), pp. 98-104.

humanity will be achieved only by means of preserving the rich pluralization that has come about through history.

A Christian's evaluation of contemporary culture looks both backward and forward. On the one hand, the direction of cultural challenge and regulation seen in the Torah and in the New Testament marks contemporary Christian codes of behavior. We are to seek to move our own cultural patterns and tendencies toward biblical ideals in the same direction as we see happening in Israel and in the New Testament. Christian advocacy and action encompass clear lines of orientation. It is passionate for the weak and helpless as well as for true religion and the ending of social oppression in all its forms. Proper connections to God, fellow humans and nature mark its shape. Christian concern includes the earth as well as the animals that inhabit God's Creation along with us.

On the other hand, none of our contemporary institutional solutions can be taken as final in the light of the coming Kingdom of God. While Christians seek to have God's will done here on earth as it is in heaven, they patiently wait and pray for the coming Kingdom. God is creating a redemptive community in which there already can be anticipations and small expressions of the coming Kingdom. Christians seek to be good citizens of that Kingdom and their earthly one.

III. God and Culture: Principles for Understanding Ethics and Culture

Now it is time to draw a number of these things into a more coherent set of assumptions and principles that will help us think more clearly about ethical issues that reside in our cultural contexts. What have we learned as we searched the Bible for the way in which God deals with human cultures?

1. What principles govern our approach, as Christians, to our cultures?

- First assumption: The Bible does not make culture or social structures that are found in the peoples that we read about in its pages sacred. It "regulates" preexisting cultural patterns and modifies them toward God's ideals. These ideals are found in Creation, Christ and the Consummation.
- Second assumption: There are a range of cultural patterns that are acceptable starting points for God in working with human beings and their cultures. We discern those starting points by seeing the range of cultural patterns with which God was willing to work in the Bible. We then see how God regulated and modified them in light of God's higher ideals for those areas of life.
- Third assumption: With care and dialogue with Christians from many cultures, we can discern those general ideals and starting points. We will likely not fully agree with one another on these matters, but we can learn to listen to each other with respect and sympathy. We can also admit that the practitioners of their own culture are likely to be wiser in incarnating Christian values and ideals in their own culture than we who are outsiders.
- Fourth assumption: In every cultural context where Christian faith is lived, there will be elements of culture that are treasured, adopted and adapted in Christian practice (the missionary principle) and others elements that are challenged (the pilgrim principle). In any case, the leaven of the Gospel will be transformative not only of individual lives but of the roles played in the social structure (and eventually the social structure) and the ideals that motivate cultural practices.

2. How do we know what is universal, trans-cultural and principle-level as opposed to the local, culturally limited and application-level in Scripture?

- What is discontinued in the New Testament or allowed for one group of Christians but not required of others involves culturally specific applications. For example:
 - Jesus discontinued the food purity laws of the Old Testament as well as many ritual requirements for dealing with various transgressions and purification issues. This shows that they were temporary measures. The book of Hebrews is a case in point where patterns instituted for Israel are no longer in force for Christian communities.
 - While there is some disagreement among Christian denominations, it appears the Sabbath rule is also transcended by Jesus and the early Christians. Nine of the Ten Commandments were reiterated in the New Testament. The Sabbath rule was not. Paul himself says that Christians differ in their observance of "sacred time." (Romans 14) Observance becomes a matter of "conscience" and "conviction" rather than the uniform rule of the community.
 - Throughout the New Testament it is clear that Jewish Christians continued to observe many of the Old Testament rules given to them. Even Paul took a Nazirite vow and then came to the Temple in Jerusalem to offer the blood sacrifice of purification. (Acts 21:20-26) Jewish Christians were not told to discontinue observing the law, but they were not to require Gentile Christians to follow the Old Testament laws given to Israel. This also suggests that many of the specific rules and regulations were culturally specific applications, not meant for all cultures and times.

- Where we find significant variations in forms and their meanings, we may reasonably suspect culturally specific applications.
 - A good example of this deals with the issue of personal appearance. In the Old Testament a Nazirite vow entailed abstaining from wine, intoxicating drinks, vinegar and raisins. He was not to go near a corpse. His hair was not to be cut. Samson was easily recognizable by the very long hair he had in comparison with his peers. Paul himself takes on a Nazirite vow. (Acts 18:18; cf. 21:23) Long hair was a symbol of special holiness and dedication. Yet, in I Corinthians 11:13-16, Paul appeals to the members of this house church to observe good decorum in their worship. In this case men are *not* to have long hair while it is seen as the glory of women. In their context, short hair was preferred for men and long for women. So, if this cultural form was a glory for Nazirites in the Old Testament, a testimony to their special holiness, but a “shame” (note: not a sin) for men in Corinth, the matter must be a culturally variant matter, not a universal.
- Where we find consistency of revelation through both Old and New Testament, we conclude we are close to a universal principle.
 - Here we can get into more contentious areas. In the appendix to Unit 8 you will find a condensed argument that the Bible is consistently of one voice on a theology of sexuality—marriage is between a man and a woman, and sexual relations are appropriate only in the married relationship. The Scripture is consistently, without exception, in all parts heterosexual in its treatment of sexual ethics. While there are variations as to how many spouses may be taken as well as attitudes toward secondary wives and concubines, there is no variation on homosexual conduct. It appears to give us a universal ethic on male/female sexuality without dictating some of the cultural variation of how families are put together.
 - The opposite is true when one considers the full range of texts on women and leadership (even religious leadership). There is variation in the biblical material, not uniformity. All priests and Levites are male as are the original twelve apostles. However, there are female prophets (Exodus 15:20; Judges 4:4; 2 Kings 22:14; Nehemiah 6:14; Isaiah 8:3; Luke 2:36; Acts 21:9), and one woman is called an Apostle (Romans 16:7—Junia is a female name). Women serve as “deacons” (there is no word for deaconess in the Greek—both males and females are called deacons when they serve in this capacity). Athaliah served (infamously) as Queen in Judah. Even in the New Testament there are times women are counseled to be quiet and other times they are counseled the opposite—by Paul himself (I Timothy 2:11-12; I Corinthians 11:5; 14:9-33¹²). This variation suggests that cultural sensibilities and conventions are at stake, not universal principles. There are cultural and social (contextual) reasons that seem to affect what roles are considered appropriate.

3. Is there a model that will help us put all of this together so we can think more clearly about ethical matters?

We want to suggest that the following graphic gives us a picture of what is going on in the chart that accompanies this section. This model is *the “tether” model*. In the center is the pillar or post to which an animal might be tied by a rope from one of its legs. It would allow it to graze, but only within the limits of the circle created by the length of the rope. There is also a game known as “tether ball” in which a ball is attached by a rope to a pole. Its circumference is also limited by the length of the rope.

The model suggests that the center point is the biblical “ideal.” This ideal is the fullness of God’s good intention and will. We find that ideal in Creation, Christ and the Consummation for a given arena.

Then there is an area that is “less than ideal” but not sinful. This is the area where God is willing to work with humans and their cultures, to regulate their practices and over time move them closer to the ideal.

Outside the circumference are practices and realities that are sinful. They are not acceptable practices or realities where God might simply regulate them toward a transformation that will move them closer to the ideal.

When you worked on your list of items for family, marriage, household, and sexuality earlier, you were engaged in a process of clarification—which practices, events, states of affairs are to be considered

¹² Note Paul’s refutation of the suppression of women’s voices in this context. I Corinthians 14:34-35 is a quotation from the Corinthians themselves, one of their false ideas. Paul immediately responds, “Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? If any think they are prophets or otherwise gifted by the Spirit, let them acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord’s command.” (vv. 36-37). Paul has given full permission for women to prophesy, in an orderly and decorous manner. He is not withdrawing that permission but challenging those in Corinth who wish to silence women to acknowledge his apostolic authority and the command of the Lord not to quench the Spirit, not even in women.

ideal, less than ideal but not sinful, or sinful—or not matters to be placed on a moral/ethical scale at all because they are matters of “freedom” (adiaphora)?

Let's illustrate this with a few things from that exercise. In terms of marriage, we discern from Genesis 1-2 that monogamy is closer to the ideal than polygamy (one Adam and one Eve and one flesh). We also learn from Jesus' reading of the text that divorce is not part of God's original intent. In some cases it is less than ideal but not sinful (as Paul

indicates in 1 Corinthians 7), but it definitely can be sinful. The reasons and motives governing divorce and how it is carried out can shift divorce into the sinful category.

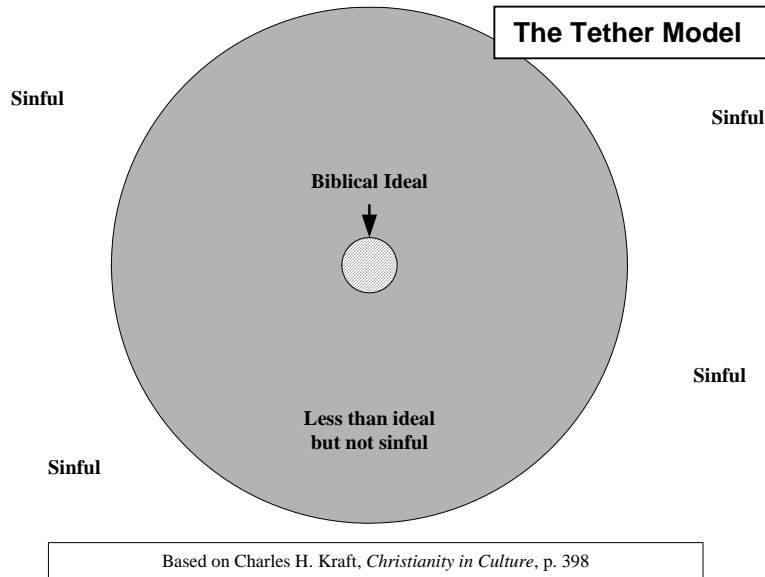
This brings us to the second model that is important in the graphic, though not displayed: *the starting point plus process model*. Let me illustrate. Polygamy (more than one spouse) is a practice and pattern God is willing to work with as a starting point.¹³ God does not condemn polygamy in the Bible but issues a number of commands and regulations to ensure that the treatment of multiple spouses is just and loving. The Old Testament laws and regulations concerning polygamy softened the harshness of this institution. When we examine the New Testament, we see that the ideal for the church leader is that he be a husband of one wife (in a polygamous environment). God sets up a process that will change the human practice of polygamy. It is a starting point joined to a process that will move cultural realities toward an ideal.

When we think of the strong fertility *ethos* of many cultures (including Old Testament Israel), we can also see that, while being married and having children is a blessing from God, it is not set up as “the ideal.” We might think this is the ideal because of all the language, even in the Creation story, of “be fruitful and multiply.” Already in the Old Testament we have hints of this not being the central ideal when eunuchs¹⁴ are promised a heritage and remembrance that normally came only with having a family line through children. (Isaiah 56:3-5; cf. Jesus' comment on eunuchs in Matthew 19:12) However, we see an even more dramatic change in the New Testament. When we consider Christ (who was unmarried and childless) and the Consummation (where there is neither marriage nor giving in marriage), we realize that the ideal is much deeper than simply married couples with children, as wondrous as that condition may be.

Too many see the ideal as married with children, when that does not seem to play out when we see Jesus as single without children, Adam and Eve as portrayed without children and the final state as not having marriage and child-bearing as elements. So, the ideal is male and females interrelated and bound together in a community of love. Marriage is not essential or central to this ideal. God identifies the problem with Adam in Genesis 2 as the fact that he was alone with no suitable helper. At the most basic level we are designed to be in relationships that are open, harmonious, just and loving. Our sexuality complicates that because it has been twisted by the entrance of sin. However, the ideal is a community of difference (male and female) in which each finds a place of creativity, responsibility and growth.

Models: Gideon

There is no doubt that Gideon is one of the most amazing military Generals of history.¹⁵ With one of the smallest armies, he thoroughly defeated a marauding horde that had pillaged Israel for six years. It



¹³ God says to King David in Nathan's prophetic rebuke for his sin of bedding Bathsheba and killing Uriah: II Samuel 12:8—"I gave your master's house to you, and your master's wives into your arms." The law of levirate marriage made polygamists of surviving brothers who were already married.

¹⁴ A "eunuch" is a castrated male who is incapable of having children. These are mentioned in the Bible though not common among the Hebrews. However, eunuchs are found in Babylon, Egypt and Rome more commonly.

¹⁵ Among warrior Generals, Gideon ranks with the greats such as Admiral Yi-sun Shin of Korea's great Imjin War. On October 26 in 1597, he defeated a Japanese armada of 333 ships and 100,000 soldiers with a puny fleet of thirteen boats.

is an astonishingly effective performance matched only by one or two others of whom we know in human history—300 matched against 135,000—and they win! What an astonishing leader.

What will you do when you lack confidence? (Judges 6-8; Hebrews 11:32-34)

Bible reading: Read the above biblical texts before continuing the module below.

The phrases that seem to epitomize the story of Gideon are Hebrews 11:33-34—“who through faith conquered kingdoms” and “whose weakness was turned to strength.” Gideon was a timid, fearful man. He was not a risk taker. Again and again he has to be reassured that God is with him, that he is a mighty warrior and that God will deliver Israel by his hand. He was not a natural visionary or swaggering, confident leader who knew just what to do to resolve the terrible oppression that annually swept in from the East.

We meet Gideon well along in life. He is married, the father of an eldest son who is a young man. His life is squeezed into a small corner by hard times. His life, up to that time, is summed up in the first scene when we meet him—secretly threshing grain in order to hide it from the oppressive power of his day. It hardly seems the thing to put on a resume or a tombstone, especially if you are a mighty warrior.

Nevertheless, he was about to accomplish some things very differently than he imagined. Along with thousands of others, he knew the score of his day. The Midianites, the Amalekites and peoples of the east were like locusts so numerous and swift on their camels that they sucked the life out of the land. There was little their victims could do but carve out hiding places in the caves and clefts of the rocks or thresh a little grain in the secrecy of a wine press.

Yet, in only a few days Gideon would find himself at the head of an northern Israelite army of 32,000 men. The Israelite warriors heavily armed, fit and seemingly ready for battle. Unfortunately 22,000 of them were frightened out of their wits, trembling in their boots. They saw in Gideon's call to war the face of death. They knew well the strength, swiftness and cruelty of this Midianite power composed of 135,000 warriors. It was a mismatch from the beginning (four of them to every one of us). From their view it was too many against too few. It was certain death. From God's point of view, the too few of Israel's army were too many.

The few have always been the key, whether a lonely Elijah surrounded by hundreds of Aramean troops (2 Kings 6:8-23) or is standing against 400 priests of Baal (1 Kings 18:16-46); or Daniel and his three friends in the midst of the hundreds of thousands of that great city of Babylon that day being commanded to bow down to the great golden idol (Daniel 3); or Jesus and the twelve on the margins of the 50 million who lived in the mighty Roman empire. It does not take many to do the Lord's work, if it indeed be the Lord's work. The reality and promise of God are all that one needs—“I will be with you.” (Judges 6:16)

The Lord reduced Gideon's army to a mere 300 and made the odds of battle even more dramatic—450 Midianites for each Israelite warrior. No question to whom the credit must go if victory came.

How do you find a leader to go up against impossible odds, much less win?

- **His ethical challenge:** To confront impossible odds in order to deliver the oppressed.
- **His ethical action:** Carrying out a surprising strategy that enabled the few of Israel to defeat the many of Midian.
- **His temptation:** To give into his lack of confidence and overwhelming sense of weakness, to play it “safe”.
- **The cost of his doing what was right:** Facing the threat of death from his home town when he set their religious practices in order.
- **The reward of his doing what was right:** The decisive deliverance of Israel and recognition of his heroic deeds.

We know the sequel to this story. Gideon was from a priestly family. His extended household had managed the altar in Ophrah. It was dedicated to Baal. One of the first things God asked Gideon to do was to destroy the instruments used to worship Baal and Asherah (his consort) and purify it for the worship of Israel's God, Yahweh. When Gideon did just that, the townsfolk wanted to kill him. Only his father's intervention saved his life.

Gideon declines kingship, but if you read further to the end of the Judges 8, you discover he gathers a large number of wives and even a concubine. We know of seventy sons, and who knows how many daughters. His son by the concubine of Shechem is given the ominous name, Abimelech, “My Father is King.” Read Judges 9 for the horrific story of this young man's attempt to be the first King of Israel, including slaughtering sixty-nine of his brothers. Gideon takes on a kingly lifestyle—all the perks and none of the responsibilities. Was he really forthright in refusing the kingship? He takes the plunder and leverages it to become an important and wealthy family in the Jezreel valley.

Gideon (or shall we say Jerub-Baal, the one named "let Baal contend with him") ends by creating a religious cult in his home town. He turns the gold of the plunder into a magnificent replica of the priestly apron and breastplate with the Urim and Thummin of the high priest. Installing them in his house, these golden pieces become snares to Israel and to his own family. What is this? How can he start this meteoric career by pulling down a false altar only to wind up by setting up an installation that encourages idolatry of a similar sort? In the end, this extraordinary man turns into a fallen hero.

He may have refused the title of King with a show of piety, but he adopted all its trappings. Inwardly the lure of success, defined by his day's own terms, overcame him. He became a "big man" by the measure of his culture, many wives and children. Through his sons and daughters and their marriages into other families and clans, he could extend his informal influence and authority. Enormous wealth could be generated by this network of family. Gideon was on his way to build his own private kingdom.

Think About It

Answer Box # 6

1. Can you describe a situation where you felt overwhelmed and lacked confidence in the face of a challenge you felt God was telling you to engage? What did you do? What level of strategic courage did you show?
2. What about the temptation after a great victory in your life to seize honor and privilege and become "a big man"?
3. Would you like to live differently in the future? If so, how?

Summary

This has been a unit with difficult material in it. Culture complicates all of our thinking, and not just about ethics. We have suggested that culture is a gift of God to humans. Culture is also something created through the powers God has given them. Though cultures often create things to facilitate and embody sinful patterns, we cannot deny this gift of God. Satan takes all the gifts God has bestowed and distorts them. When we ask, "What is the relationship of God to human cultures?" our basic answer was simple—God regulates human cultures by giving God's ideals and by working within and with them at acceptable starting points. God is willing to meet people and their cultures as and where they are, but the starting point is not the end point. It begins a process similar to the growth process of the Christian, moving from childhood to full adult maturity. No single language and no single culture are validated as divinely sanctioned. We all live in a variety of different languages and cultures. The Kingdom ethics of Jesus establishes the boundaries and ideals that are meant to enable us to live as pilgrims and missionaries in each of the cultures God bestowed on us by our birth and upbringing. Gideon is an example of a man of God who was finally seduced by his culture and times, by his desire for power and influence. He brought great deliverance to Israel and then set up religious practices that mislead Israel. In Appendix A you will find a very interesting attempt to characterize some pervasive features of culture that affect how ethics is done and thought about in the West and in contrasting cultural streams.

Unit 9 Final Assignment

Final Assignment

1. Write on one to two pages your thoughts about the nature of culture in biblical perspective and how you see the importance of culture impacting specific types of relationships in your personal life and with those you encounter in the organization or church in which you work. What challenges come to you because of key cultural features of your context?
2. On another one to two pages write some ideas you have as a Christian leader about how to influence the younger generation to make ethical decisions and life choices that please God in light of these cultural challenges they face with you. What could you do personally to show them how to be both a pilgrim and a missionary in your context and so more visibly model Christ-like values in your life as a Christian and as a leader in culturally appropriate ways? Please comment on these questions in your email assignment and identify any concrete actions you are thinking and praying about taking.
3. Please confirm that you have discussed the results of your interactive work in Unit 9 ("Think About It" boxes) with a group of two other people. (See "Note on Process" on page v in the "Expectations for the Course" section of the Introduction to the Course.)
4. Have you read Stott, 419-442 The New Biotechnology; 443-482 Same-Sex Relationships? If Stott is right about these issues, what should that mean for you practically?

When your work is complete (three to five pages total), send a copy to your facilitator via email as an attachment. Please send it by the date indicated in the Module Calendar.

Appendix A: Cross-Cultural Values and Ethics

The following model was developed by Bernard Adeney.¹⁶ It provides polar tendencies on a variety of areas of life. It is a way of becoming sensitive to and aware of these different, but often equally valid ways of engaging the world in which God has placed us. With all the mixing of cultures, the challenge for us as Christians is sorting what is merely a cultural preference and practice from what is ethically questionable, even sinful. Many cultural practices are “less than ideal” but not sinful. Adeney helps us start sorting some of that.

The model follows a number of earlier attempts to map the cultural options that humans have developed as they have sought to order life. Nearly thirty different categories have been proposed in empirical studies of the differing value systems of a variety of cultures. Various ways of posing the question of how cultures differ in their values and priorities means widely differing accounts from such research. All of this research is aware that the models are not simple descriptions but simplified pictures of themes and tendencies.

The model below is similar. It is a model. It is useful in helping us think about our own tendencies and preferences as well as those from differing cultural backgrounds. The usefulness of all these models is not in their completeness but in their ability to help highlight and develop awareness of our cultural tendencies. If it helps us see those differences and see how they apply to given contexts where people are pursuing given purposes, they make us more sensitive to why ethical decisions often differ, even among those who are authentic and dedicated followers of Christ.

Bernard Adeney says the following about his model:

“Twelve categories of human thought and behavior are considered under three headings: ‘The individual,’ ‘the social’ and ‘the cosmos.’ Each of the twelve categories are divided into two polar cultural value orientations. These should not be thought of as two different specific cultures but rather as the two ends of a continuum, with some cultures tending toward one extreme or the other. While ‘Western’ culture tends toward the conceptions listed first (1), different cultures may be at different ends of the continuum for different categories.

“My model focuses on the ethical implications of different value orientations. It is different from other models in that it not only describes cultural value orientations but also evaluates them. It is both descriptive and normative. One category in the model focuses on different ethical priorities that seem to follow from different orientations. The last two categories suggest some moral strengths and weaknesses that may be inherent tendencies in particular orientations. The contrasting strengths and weaknesses reflect my assumption that no culture is free of moral weakness or devoid of moral strength. Often strengths and weaknesses or good and evil in a culture are flip sides of each other.”¹⁷

¹⁶ *Strange Virtues: Ethics in a Multicultural World* (InterVarsity Press, 1995), pp. 256-258.

¹⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 255.

Continuum Model of Cultural Values: Individual					
Issues/Area	Conception	Values	Priorities	Virtues/Skills developed	Dangerous vices/results
Inner/Outer life, emotions	1. outer life controls inner and is the sources of happiness	1. free expression, elimination of suffering, happiness	1. create conditions of life that will make you happy	1. openness, honesty, lack of inhibition, creativity	1. lack of self-control, self-assertiveness, impatience
	2. inner life controls outer and is the source of power	2. serenity, emotional control, asceticism	2. develop a strong inner live impervious to suffering	2. self-control, patience, good humor, discipline	2. hypocrisy, repression and bitterness, dishonesty
Motivation and Repression	1. inner-directed, guilt oriented	1. live life according to your own highest ideals	1. authenticity, repentance, forgiveness	1. sincerity, integrity, responsibility, acceptance of criticism	1. conflict, self-centeredness, judgmentalism
	2. outer-directed, shame oriented	2. fulfill your duties to the group	2. duty, respect, pride, absence of conflict	2. discretion, dignity, consideration of others	2. hypocrisy, refusal of responsibility or criticism
Thought process and learning	1. dichotomous, objective, analytic, inductive	1. critical thinking, analysis of parts, facts	1. perception of structure, objectivity, truth	1. accuracy, discrimination, acceptance of criticism	1. atomism, loss of perspective, positivism, reductionism
	2. holistic, intuitive, subjective, deductive	2. seeing the whole, sensing relationships, interpretation	2. subjective harmony, synthesis, contextual	2. dialectical thought, holism, perspective	2. subjectivism, weak critical skills, prejudice
Relational Identity	1. core identity as an individual	1. authenticity, independence, rights, equal opportunity, self-realization	1. freedom, individuality, independence, procedural justice	1. initiative, respect for the individual, creativity, independent thought	1. selfish individualism, isolation, alienation, injustice
	2. core identity as a member of a group	2. group solidarity, harmony, the fitting	2. group success, unity, harmony, conformity, distributive justice	2. social solidarity, care for the weak, humility, security	2. lack of initiative, dependency, abuse of human rights, conformity.

Continuum Model of Cultural Values: Social					
Issues/Area	Conception	Values	Priorities	Virtues/Skills developed	Dangerous vices/results
Family structure, authority	1. egalitarian, individualistic, democratic	1. equality, independence, self-determination	1. individual rights, personal freedom, equal power, openness	1. self-respect, articulateness, independence, competitiveness	1. fragmentation, breakdown of authority, selfishness
	2. hierarchical, lineal/collateral, authoritarian	2. honor, filial piety, loyalty	2. "the fitting," duty, security, harmony	2. other respect, obedience, self-control, loyalty	2. tyranny, fear, inequality, oppression
Sex and gender	1. gender equality	1. equal rights and responsibilities for women and men	1. empowerment of women, eliminate inequality and	1. Personal freedom and independence for women, mutual respect	1. alienation, individualism, identity confusion, defensiveness

	2. gender difference	2. protection of women, male leadership	2. women's responsibility for family, stopping exploitation of women	2. honor, submission, responsibility in your role	2. arrogance, oppressiveness, triviality, dependency, subservience
Power and status	1. low power distance, status by achievement	1. equality, achievement, competition, youth	1. equal opportunity, equal rights, success to the competent	1. fairness, ambition, striving for excellence	1. survival of the fittest, individualism, egocentrism
	2. high power distance, status by ascription	2. honor, respect, duty, cooperation, obedience, age	2. social harmony, solidarity, respect	2. humility, meekness, benevolence	2. arrogance, resignation, oppression
Activity goals	1. productivity, achievement, high mobility	1. efficiency, material and intellectual results	1. increasing productivity, results	1. efficiency, pragmatism, expertise	1. materialism, individualism, insensitivity, competitiveness
	2. relationality, social cohesion, low mobility	2. relations, people, status	2. strengthening relationships, maintaining harmony	2. sensitivity, friendliness, flexibility	2. inefficiency, laziness, dependency

Continuum Model of Cultural Values: Cosmos					
Issues/Area	Conception	Values	Priorities	Virtues/Skills developed	Dangerous vices/results
Spiritual and material	1. empirical and public existence entirely material	1. bring all life under material explanation and control	1. mastery of nature, a just and prosperous society	1. rationality, scientific expertise, practicality	1. materialism, reductionism, relativism
	2. spiritual and material equally real and public	2. spiritual and physical conditions in harmony	2. spiritual power and safety, obedience to God	2. spirituality, intuitiveness, piety, balance	2. superstition, fear, bondage to spiritual power and rules
Nature	1. nature as a resource to be used and enjoyed	1. extract as much profit and pleasure as possible	1. exploitation and conservation	1. resourcefulness, respect, love for nature	1. greed, exploitation, lack of reverence or harmony with nature
	2. nature as a power to be served or protected from	2. appeasement and control of nature	2. safety and survival	2. reverence, fear, harmony with nature	2. fear, inhibition, antagonism or subjugation
Time	1. linear, open, "monochronic" ¹⁸	1. efficiency, productivity, planning, future	1. change, progress, transformation	1. discipline, hope, courage, initiative	1. aggressiveness, ambition, selfishness
	2. cyclical, "polychronic", immeasurable, determined	2. flexibility, spontaneity, submission, present and past	2. harmony, the event, acceptance, peace, tranquility, the fitting	2. long-suffering, patience, contentment, "apatheia" ¹⁹ , commitment to people	2. resignation, conservatism, corruption, apathy

¹⁸ See chart and explanation on next page for the distinction between monochronic and polychronic people.

¹⁹ Refers to a state of mind where one is free from emotional disturbance.

Remember, this is a continuum model. While Western cultures tend to affirm and embody number ones in these charts, that is not invariably the case, nor is the cultural preference necessarily true of any individual from a given culture.

Following this, we have picked "Time" as an example, to develop in more detail as illustrative of this chart. The "Monochronic" and the "Polychronic" orientations play out in a variety of ways in practical everyday life as well in leadership styles.

Monochronic vs. Polychronic cultures is a distinction introduced by Edward Hall, *The Silent Language*, in 1959. It has since been recognized that people also can orient themselves in these ways as well.

Monochronic People	Polychronic People
Do one thing at a time	Do many things at once
Concentrate on the job	Are highly distractible and subject to interruptions
Take time commitments (deadlines, schedules) seriously	Consider time commitments an objective to be achieved, if possible
Are low-context and need information	Are high-context and already have information
Are committed to the job	Are committed to people and human relationships
Adhere religiously to plans	Change plans often and easily
Are concerned about not disturbing others; follow rules of privacy and consideration	Are more concerned with those who are closely related (family, friends, close business associates) than with privacy
Show great respect for private property; seldom borrow or lend	Borrow and lend things often and easily
Emphasize promptness	Base promptness on the relationship
Are accustomed to short-term relationships	Have strong tendency to build lifetime relationships

Polychronic view of time:

Time management is often presented as a logical series of steps, but some people have a less than logical view of time. They observe polychronic time.

Attitudes:

This view of time is not so easily recognized by most. It is characterized by spur of the moment decisions based upon intuition, creativity and less adherence to rigid rules.

Definition:

Polychronic time followers are not comfortable at repetitive tasks that are easy to define within boundaries. They benefit from the personal contact that tasks may produce. Their tasks are perhaps less easy to define and measure, for example, "what is the best design for the bedroom?" To work well they benefit from people contact. They tend to be in professions where monochronic time is not so important. Such jobs might be in the arts, marketing, teaching etc.

Culture:

Many cultures value human contact, patience and honesty above speed. Contact with Asian, Arabic, Japanese and other cultures may require us to adjust our thinking and practices when considering business and personal dealings. Their approach to tasks will tend to conflict with yours if, like many Northern European countries and the USA, you take a monochronic view on matters.

Plans:

The polychronic person will use plans but is quite happy to be flexible in his or her approach to achieve the desired goal. They may flit from project to project as the mood takes them gaining inspiration from one project to utilize on the other. Flexibility is a useful trait of the polychronic person.

Monochronic view of time:

Time management, traditionally, is taught to appeal to logical, punctual people at home with systems. These people have a monochronic view of time.

Attitudes:

This view of time is easily recognized by most. It is characterized by punctuality, rules, conformity and speed.

Definition:

Monochronic time followers are great at repetitive tasks that are easy to define within boundaries. How long does it take to get a bottle of milk? How long does it take to clean the car? They have a clear start

Ethical Reasoning: Unit 9 - Ethics and Culture: What's the Difference?

and a well defined end point. You don't need to have a big reliance on people skills to complete them. They tend to be data-orientated with results based on easily accessible previous experience. Jobs involving repetitive task tend to be based upon monochronic views of time, for example, accountants, train drivers, etc., and a polychronic approach is less important. If you are required to think too much or need flexibility then the job will often falter.

Culture:

Northern European countries (for example Great Britain, Germany) and the USA have a monochronic view of time. This can be a hindrance if a polychronic approach to tasks is not considered for those countries that favor this system. Many cultures value human contact, patience and honesty above speed, for example, Asian, Arabic, Japanese and others. Their approach to tasks will tend to conflict with yours if, like many Northern European countries and the USA, you take a monochronic view on matters. In the case of the Japanese, they blend both styles. In technology and dealings with foreigners they tend to be monochronic, and for personal relations they tend to be polychronic.

Plans:

The monochronic person loves plans. He probably wouldn't even start a project without a plan to which he must adhere. The logical approach to tasks means completing activities in a stepwise manner, should all go to plan provided the necessary thought has gone into it. What happens if the plan goes awry? Monochronic people are less flexible and don't like detours from plans. However, plans do go wrong and flexibility is a useful trait of the polychronic person. You may say that in this case, the person would have considered a back up or contingency plan. However, a true contingency plan would have been considered already and would be awaiting a trigger to implement it. A true deviation from a plan is unforeseen.

Other:

The monochronic person will favor plans. They will be reluctant to modify plans unless forced to and will want to finish one task properly before beginning another. Their sense of logic will require supporting information that governs their actions. Interpersonal relationships will not hold great importance in the search for project completion.

Issues:

If you have a polychronic personality, it is likely that meetings with monochronic persons will be short and to the point. You may need to expand particular areas to fully understand the issues and possible solutions. You may need to manage the expectations of a monochronic person to expand on the exact requirements to make sure you have the correct task definition. As a monochronic person, you may need to renegotiate the time of individual meetings so that you can complete a meeting properly rather than wrapping it up prematurely. If you feel under time pressure, take some time out to recharge your batteries. Give yourself space for creative thinking. Make sure you create backup plans that you may have to implement.

Flexibility:

The problem with approaching tasks in either a monochronic or polychronic format is that you may miss the benefits of the other. For example, what may appear to be an untidy desk top to one person is an easy retrieval system to another. The less organized person will still work on one task at a time but flit from one project to another quite effortlessly because that person can find the relevant files easily. The monochronic person's desire to follow "rules" may cause problems if there is an interruption in the process flow. However, enforced flexibility can be a good thing, for rethinking or returning to an issue can have benefits for the polychronic person.

Ethics for Living and Leading

Unit 10

What is Involved in the Ethics of Organizations?



Development Associates International

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Unit 10 – What is Involved in the Ethics of Organizations? (Instilling a culture of responsibility)

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Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this unit you will be able to:

- Spell out the basic questions to ask in order to identify the seriousness of a potential ethical issue;
- Explain the role and importance of codes of ethics or conduct used by organizations;
- Outline some important steps an organization can take to ensure ethically proper conduct throughout its stakeholders;
- List some of the typical sorts of ethical misconduct seen in many organizations.

Steps to Complete Unit 10

Read and Respond

Readings are included at the end of most units. These texts provide biblical and cultural framework for an adequate understanding of Christian ethics. Please reflect and respond as indicated in assignments found within the texts.

Supplementary text: For Unit 11 read Stott pp. 217-268 (The World of Work; Business Relationships)

Note: Complete the final email assignment for Unit 10.

Lecture Notes & Workbook

Overview

Are you concerned that the environment is gradually being destroyed (global warming)? Does the bad conduct of corporate executives bother you (Enron)? Are you angry when a company's sloppy errors lead to death and destruction (Bophal)? Do you want to build your career on something more significant than individual self-interest?

If so, you are concerned with organizational ethics, corporate governance and responsibility.

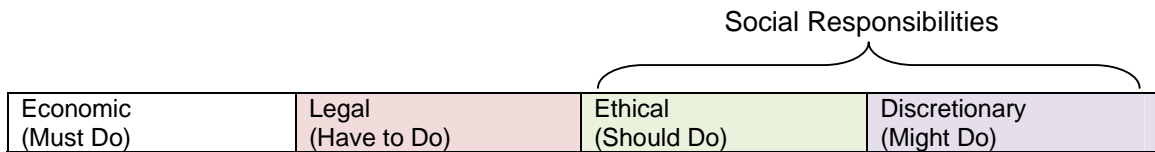
The whole notion of ethics in the workplace or for business organizations has not always been obvious. It has taken many disastrous events (misconduct on a large scale) to motivate change in this area. While a majority of for-profit companies in the West have a code of conduct related to their statement of mission and core values, the development and implementation of these has been inconsistent and difficult.

Some writers on business and economics, such as Milton Friedman, think ethical considerations should have little or nothing to do with the conduct of business enterprises.¹ His concept is as follows:

There is one and only one social responsibility of business—to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits so long as it stays within the rules of the game, which is to say, engages in open and free competition without deception or fraud.

For Friedman the best approach is a laissez-faire economy with a minimum of governmental regulation. To use shareholder resources to reduce pollution, to hire the disadvantaged or hard-core unemployed, or to cut prices when inflation threatens is to use them irresponsibly. Such conduct spends shareholder money for social or ethical reasons rather than for business reasons. By taking on the costs of these social issues the firm drives up its costs and, in the long run, harms not only itself but society at large. Friedman sees the notion of the “social responsibility” of business firms as a “fundamentally subversive doctrine.” The only ethics that apply are the rules of free competition and a minimalist requirement of not committing deception or fraud.

In contrast, Archie Carroll sees business organizations as having four responsibilities to fulfill.²



1. The company's mission is to fill its economic responsibilities to produce goods and services of value to the society so that it makes the revenues necessary to repay its creditors and shareholders.
2. Legal responsibilities are those defined by governments and international accords. They prescribe and proscribe a number of practices and actions that are considered essential to good conduct (such as laws about handling hazardous materials or rules governing the process of hiring and firing employees).
3. Ethical responsibilities are those that respond to the widely-held community beliefs about good practice and conduct that have not been codified into legal requirements. It may be that the community expectation (as in Japan) is that employment is life-long. When there are difficult economic times, the company is expected to retain employees, even if on very reduced compensation until an expansionary phase returns. It would be seen as unethical if the company simply fired a lot of employees as a means of sustaining itself through difficult times. It is not required legally, but it is a wider expectation of the community. The same can be said of corporate response when issues with the safety of its product are identified. It may not be legally required to recall and repair items, but it may be the ethically responsible thing to do, something the public expects.
4. Discretionary responsibilities are the purely voluntary obligations an organization assumes. These might be philanthropic contributions, providing on-site day care centers for the small children of employees, giving employees paid time off to volunteer to address crises or chronic issues in the community. The difference between discretionary and ethical responsibilities is that the larger community expects the organization to do what is ethical whereas most do not expect it to do the discretionary things.

¹ *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 133.

² A.B. Carroll, "A Three-Dimensional Conceptual Model of Corporate Performance," *Academy of Management Review* (October 1979), pp. 497-505.

Carroll argues that such socially responsible conduct on the part of organizations actually provides a competitive advantage over the long term. It does so partly because such conduct forestalls increased government regulation (where the government engages in moving what is ethically desirable into legal requirements). In addition, companies seen to be socially responsible can gain advantages in the market place (charging higher prices for products seen to be environmentally safe and gaining brand loyalty; gaining suppliers who want to work with the company because of its reputation for being ethical so they don't have to spend resources "policing" contracts to see they are fulfilled; attracting outstanding employees who want to work for a responsible firm; securing entry more easily into foreign countries, attracting capital investment from investors who see the company as desirable because of its high standards etc.).³

The four responsibilities are ranked, according to Carroll. First, the organization must remain financially viable. It must balance the books and pay its bills year to year. It remains in existence and can meet all the legal mandates and regulations that affect its operations. With those two responsibilities satisfied, it can look to meeting its social responsibilities (ethical and discretionary).

What we must recognize is that, while organizations are economic entities (even not-for-profits), they are also social institutions. They must justify their existence by their overall contribution to society. The importance of organizations' concern for the ethics of what they do corporately is rooted in this recognition. Even if it is not the "best business" sense to do what is ethical, there is a social responsibility inherent in the community's permission (through governmental regulations) for an organization to exist and carry out its mission and operations. Businesses are not endowed by some special divine rights of capitalism to do as they please in order to meet shareholder and management goals for income. They exist finally for some benefits they provide for the larger human community. For the many people who work for governmental, NGO, church or not-for-profits, the tension between economic profits and "non-profitable" conduct that is ethical and discretionary is not the same. They exist in order to engage "social responsibilities."

Case Study: Let's Make a Deal⁴

Harun was going on his first business trip. He had just finished ten weeks of training at his company, Portico. His supervisor felt it was a good time to send him along with one of the company's best salesman to observe his handling of customers. This was Harun's first job after university. He was married with one small child and another on the way.

Aydin was generally talked about in the office in tones of respect and wonder. He had been the number one sales representative for five years running. He had been at Portico for fifteen years. If you were ever to learn the secrets of good sales techniques, it would be on a trip with Aydin.

The first two stops displayed Aydin's talent. He was very good, but you could tell he had been dealing with these companies for years so they were easy calls. The third was a different matter. Aydin had been trying for months to get Stardock to look at Portico's product line. At last, Kemal Atti agreed to take a look. As Aydin and Harun neared Stardock's building, Aydin said, "Kemal is a hard sell, but I think we can get him to give us some business."

When the meeting began, Kemal explained that Stardock had been quite happy with their previous suppliers until recently. They had become more difficult to deal with and not always reliable. So, he was looking for an alternative.

Aydin was right; Kemal was a hard sell. Every time it looked like he was about to agree to an order, he pulled back. However, Aydin was up to the task. He stayed positive and kept selling the value and qualities of Portico's products.

"Look, Aydin, I'll be honest," said Kemal. "I had a pretty good deal with my old suppliers until they had some personnel turnover last month."

"Well, you'll get a good deal from us," said Aydin.

"That remains to be seen. Look, your prices are a little high, though I believe your quality and service may be worth the extra cost. But, how about this? Suppose I agree to pay you one percent more than you are asking?" Kemal leaned back in his chair to catch the expressions on Aydin and Harun's faces. He noticed a change in Aydin's face right away.

"What do you mean, Kemal?" Aydin asked.

Kemal asked Aydin if Harun could be trusted and Aydin said yes. He explained that Harun was a real go-getter and was willing to do whatever to get a sale.

³ Examples of such companies are: Whole Foods (environmentally friendly - premium prices for all-natural, pesticide-free food stuffs); Ben and Jerry's Homemade Ice cream (Brand loyalty); Maytag (brand loyalty); Procter & Gamble (great company to work for); Johnson & Johnson; Rubbermaid (attracted investor capital); Levi Strauss (entrance into foreign markets).

⁴ Based on "Padding or Profit" in Pfeffer and Forsberg, *Ethics on the Job*, 2nd Edition (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing, 2000) pp. 105-07.

"Well, it would work this way," said Kemal. "It's the same deal I had with my previous suppliers. I'll authorize my company to pay the higher price, but you report the lower price to Portico. We now have a one percent surplus with which to play around. You take half of that, and I'll take the other half. With our volume, I figure we can each make about US\$2000 a year clear and free. You can split yours with Harun however you want. All you have to do is write up two order forms—one for my people and one for yours for the lower amount. No one will ever know but us."

Aydin said he would think about it and would call Kemal tomorrow with an answer.

That night Aydin and Harun discussed Kemal's offer. Harun said he was absolutely against it, but Aydin said you had to consider all the angles. This sort of thing, he said, was common practice and it would not hurt Portico. Portico would be getting the price it asked for its products and making its usual profit. Also, a little extra money would come in handy for both of them.

Nevertheless, Harun pressed the case; this is illegal and could create problems. Aydin said that no one could find out so there would be no danger. If questions arose, they could say it was Kemal's scam and you did not know he was doing it. If Kemal got caught, they could deny having written up two order forms because they were typed and couldn't be traced back to them.

"Look, Harun," he said, "we get paid to bring in sales. I bring in more than US\$600,000 every year, and Portico loses nothing. In fact, I build their profits. When we first met, you said you were a real go-getter and would do what it took to become the next number one sales representative at Portico. Did you mean it? I've had similar arrangements in the past and they worked out well for everyone." Aydin pointed out that the markup would not hurt Kemal's company and Portico's product was worth at least that much and more. If Harun wasn't willing to do what it takes in this business, he would find himself jobless quickly. Aydin implied that he would give Harun a bad performance review that would significantly impact his future at Portico.

Harun left to return home for the night. He told Aydin he would sleep on it and let him know in the morning. However, in the darkness of the night, questions kept running through his mind. The ethical ones seemed most troubling.

Think About It

Answer Box # 1

Organizations face the issue of employees "creatively" bending the rules. In thinking about this case, what do you think Harun should do and why? What organizational resources might you want to be able to use in navigating this difficult situation if Harun decides not "to go along to get along?"

Organizations can make it easy or difficult for their employees to do what is right. In this unit we will consider a variety of measures and practices that facilitate good ethical behavior on the part of all employees. Some organizations are "ethically fit" in that they have put in place statements, policies and practices that engender high levels of morale and morality among all their stakeholders.

Organizational Ethics

When we move to the organizational level (as opposed to the individual level), we need to ask our basic question again. How do we recognize the ethically right and wrong? How does an organization determine what it is obliged to do? Are there best practices that guide us in shaping the way we seek to build ethically healthy and strong organizations, whether non-profit, for-profit or ecclesiastical, educational or governmental?

David W. Gill offers a number of helpful guidelines in answering just such questions.⁵ We will follow much of his development of those answers. First, let's define what we mean by an "ethically healthy" organization.

We can recognize an ethically healthy organization by its practices and protocols that show it cares about right and wrong. It is not just willing to discuss its activities and decisions in light of right and wrong, but it actually holds itself, its employees and its board accountable for compliance with its

⁵ David W. Gill, *It's About Excellence: Building Ethically Healthy Organizations*, (Executive Excellence Publishing, 2008). David Gill is a Christian ethicist specializing in ethics in the workplace. He is the Mockler-Phillips Professor of Workplace Theology & Business Ethics and Director of the Mockler Center for Faith & Ethics in the Workplace at Gordon Conwell Seminary.

espoused ethical values. It means being sure that decisions and projects consider the ethical issues involved and then act with due diligence and responsibility.

This does not mean perfection, because no organization is perfect in discernment or performance. It means a good faith effort that shows clear intention to do what is right and creates a “no tolerance” organizational culture for unethical conduct. We’ll have more to say about ethically healthy or fit organizations later.

Think About It

Answer Box # 2

Thinking about the organization for which you currently work, how would you assess its “ethical health?” How healthy would you say it is? What are its chief responses when ethical issues arise? Does it have a standard code of conduct known to all in the organization? Does it actually reward those who raise ethical issues and seek compliance with good practices?

A. Recognizing What is Ethically Right

Right away we must remember that we are no longer in the realm of the individual alone. The basic values and standards that frame our sense of right and wrong remain constant, but the context changes. Now we are often in a diverse and changing scene. We have to find common ground when there are multiple perspectives, experiences and insights. We cannot simply practice a sort of ethical “imperialism” in which we enforce all the values and principles to which we as an individual may be committed. Neither can we afford ethical “apathy” (“Live and let live: let others do what they do—I will be ethical in my conduct”). To be sure, we need to be individuals of integrity and high ethical conduct. However, once we are embedded in an organization, it is no longer simply about “me” but about “us.” It is about *shared* ethical standards and practices.

In addition, life is complex as are the situations that face many organizations. If we are to lessen our risk of individual compromise and harm as well as that of the organization, we need some guidelines that help us find long-term, ethically healthy criteria for navigating these matters. To help recognize what is ethically right we will follow David W. Gill’s list of six questions that we can ask as organizations.⁶ The first two are “compliance” issues (that is, they test whether our decisions and conduct are in accord with acknowledged, written standards). Items three through five are actual standards that go beyond simple compliance. Item six is the bottom line in ethical practice.

Gill’s Six Questions:

1. Does it violate or comply with the law?
2. Does it violate or comply with company and/or professional ethics?
3. Does it violate or agree with your (and others’) personal values and conscience?
4. Would you like it to be done to you or those you care about?
5. Would it cause a scandal or uproar if it were publicized?
6. Could someone be seriously harmed by it, or will they be helped?

1. Does it violate or comply with the law?

Ethics is not defined nor exhausted by the law, but it cannot ignore the law. It is part of acting responsibly. Any long term strategy for sustainability will need to come to terms with the laws and regulations of the governing authorities.

In the for-profit sector there commonly are a number of laws governing organizations:

- Product liability (tort laws);
- Contracts and breaches of contracts (contract laws);
- Protection of intellectual property (intellectual property laws);
- Competitive behavior (antitrust laws);
- Selling of securities (securities laws).

These involve matters that not only deal with ethics but also with what is legal and illegal. These laws and the regulations that are built on them are critical regulating standards. To violate them is to do

⁶ Ibid., pp. 20-25.

what is not only unethical but also what is illegal. In the long run, avoiding litigation and possible criminal penalties is a strong incentive to stay within the limits of the law.

Often there is a larger circle of regulations, directives and court decisions that also provides part of the larger context of legal requirements; these may have to do with such things as working conditions (health and safety requirements), marketing and advertising conduct, environmental protection regulations, protection of whistleblowing employees, and so on. Many large organizations will have a legal compliance office to ensure that all the regulations of various countries in which they serve are taken into account in the conduct of the organization.

In the best cases, the laws of a government grow out of what is ethically right. We know this is not always the case (laws permitting child labor, slavery, environmental destruction, unsafe workplaces etc.). So, what is legal may be unethical. The correspondence between what is legal and what is ethical is not precise. Nevertheless, this is the first test—compliance with the written laws of the context.

An ethical organization does its best to know and comply with the laws and regulations of its host country and locale.

2. Does it violate or comply with company and/or professional ethics?

Most ethical issues arise because there is conflict between the goals of the organization or the goals of individual managers and the fundamental rights of various stakeholders. Most codes of conduct and core values address the manner in which the organization and its employees are to carry out their activities in order to ensure that the rights and well-being of all involved in the enterprise are respected and nourished. Some expectations that are normally associated with various stakeholders are as follows:

- Stockholders have a right to timely and accurate information about their investments.
- Customers have the right to be fully informed about the products and services they purchase (including the right to know the potential harm that use of that product or service might cause).
- Employees have the right to safe working conditions, fair compensation for their work and just treatment by managers.
- Suppliers have the right to expect contracts to be kept and to be paid in a timely fashion.
- Competitors have the right to expect the organization to abide by the rules of competition and not violate the basic principles of any antitrust laws.
- Communities and the general public have the right to expect that the organization will not violate the basic expectations that society places upon them.

More and more companies have developed codes of conduct that spell out expectations. (See Unit 12 for examples of such codes.) We touch on this aspect of organizations in the Strategic Thinking course because it is one component involved in the implementation of strategy. In that course we also deal with a wisdom approach to strategic thinking. There we said that strategic wisdom displays a leadership that is people-focused, principle-centered and servant-leader in style. Organizational wisdom is developed over time when an organization becomes a “learning” organization. Moral or ethical maturity is part of such wisdom.

The principles followed in corporate codes of conduct give guidance to individual and corporate conduct. They are developed to implement and spell out the meaning of their core values in a variety of ways. At their best, they are detailed enough to provide clear guidance but not so detailed that they hamper the freedom and creativity of their employees. (See Appendix B of this unit for criteria to evaluate and develop such codes of conduct).

Professional codes of conduct to deal with the specific challenges and responsibilities of given occupations (such as counselors or therapists, engineers, journalists, police, military, legal professions, medical workers, auditors and chartered accountants, clergy, HR directors, etc.) have developed codes of conduct for their members that go far beyond the limits of the legal. These are based on the experiences of professionals of the challenges and pressures that they face in practice. These are not drawn up by political authorities but by the members of the profession.

Such codes of conduct vary in their scope, quality and detail. They are not all fully developed and some of them were created in an attempt to “look good” without any of the organizational means or structures necessary to carry them out in good faith. Nonetheless, non-compliance with company or professional codes of conduct is a red flag that something may be wrong.

An ethical organization will comply with its own values and standards as well as relevant professional codes of conduct.

3. Does it violate or agree with your (and others’) personal values and conscience?

This is the first of three ethical standards that go beyond simple compliance with legal regulations and codes of conduct. In this case the test is that inner warning that comes from your own values or conscience that something is not right. To be sure, you (or others) cannot impose your own convictions on

others. You may have the wrong convictions or scruples, and in a diverse setting your fellow workers may have quite different sentiments.

Regardless, this is not something to be ignored. If you discover that you are not alone in being troubled, in having a “gut feeling” that something isn’t right, pay attention. This is a warning signal that something may be unfair, dangerous or wrong. Take it seriously.

This is where faith and personal philosophy can help. If it violates the clear ethical teaching of a religion or philosophy, it may be helping you to be sensitive to right and wrong in ways that those around you are not. As a Christian you are committed to a number of things that may not be shared with your colleagues in the workplace. We don’t have to agree on all matters of faith and ethics to have the right to share our own concerns; nor will we see our own convictions implemented. There are times when we must leave an organization, depending on the level or importance of the deeply held value at stake. However, at times sharing our personal ethical convictions will help shape a better ethical climate and outcome.

In this case, an ethical organization respects the personal ethical convictions and consciences of its stakeholders.

4. Would you like it to be done to you or those you care about?

This is an expression of the Golden Rule. This remains one of the best tests of ethical conduct. This asks that you use your imagination and put yourself in the place of several of the stakeholders who are impacted by this decision or action. If you were the customer and not the producer, if you were the stock holder and not the CEO, if you were the family that lived across from the site where the company dumps its waste, if you were the supplier waiting for fair payment, if you were the employee working for these wages and under these conditions and not the owner—and on and on—would this action be one that you would see as ethical and good? Would you be happy to see your child on the other end of this decision or action? Remember the ECI principle from Unit 5!

In this test we move from attitude (“how does this feel to my conscience”) to behavior. Now we are talking about behavior. Something is going to be done, and people are going to live with the consequences of this action. We are raising the following question in our team or organization: how would we like to be treated?

An ethical organization treats others as it would like to be treated.

5. Would it cause a scandal or uproar if it were publicized?

Transparency and public exposure are other excellent tests of the ethical quality of conduct or an arrangement. Those who do what is ethically shady or downright evil do not wish others to know what they are doing. Secrecy of this sort favors misconduct.

The question to ask here is, would this decision or action be tolerated if it were on the front page of tomorrow’s news? Is this an action that we want to be associated with our name and the name of our organization for the foreseeable future?

To be sure there are some things that should not see the daylight of general publicity (posted on YouTube or Facebook). There are proprietary organizational secrets, legitimate strategic and financial information that, if known, would damage the competitiveness of the company or confidential personnel information. We are not talking about those sorts of things. The test of publicity is not, by itself, sufficient. It is a good question to ask nonetheless.

We need to ask of anything kept secret, what are the motivation and reasons for keeping this secret? If it is because we know it would create a scandal or show to the world that we are willing to do unethical or immoral things, then it fails the ethics test.

We might think of government agencies that engage in illegitimate and unethical actions (such as the intelligence agency sanctioning assassinations or organizations giving special preference for lucrative contracts to certain businesses due to kickbacks). What they stamp as “top secret” has nothing to do with national security but with the security of the bureaucrats who are exceeding the law or who are simply corrupt.

One of the most recent damaging revelations has come with what appears to most to be the Roman Catholic hierarchy’s cover-up of the repeated, long-term issue of sexual abuse by priests. This conduct was tolerated, not adequately addressed and kept from public prosecution for what was clearly criminalized behavior. In retrospect, it was a very bad set of decisions and practices.

An ethical organization is transparent and able to defend its action in public.

6. Could someone be seriously harmed by it, or will they be helped?

This moves beyond the two questions dealing with compliance with written standards (laws and codes of conduct) and the three questions that raise basic ethical standards (conscience, the Golden Rule and publicity) to the bottom line. This is the one test that can stand on its own even though it works best when linked to the prior five questions.

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To be sure, there is no absolute risk-free organization, product or context. We have to ask, what are acceptable levels of risk of harm? We are not likely to agree on precise calculations of risk, but this is still a good question. Where we have good information on the risks and harm done over time, we have good reason to put mitigating measures in place.

The coal mining industry is a case in point. The risks of methane gas explosions, the health consequences over time of breathing in air contaminated with high levels of coal dust, the issues of cave ins and the destruction of habitat by the dumping of waste materials—none of these are new issues. Nevertheless, coal companies continue to minimize their costs partly by not providing adequate ventilation to their mine shafts and better protection against lung disease and long term medical care, or by not dealing with the costs of the environmental results of their mining. The ethics are often outweighed by the drive to maximize profit, even at the cost of short-cutting measures to mitigate the known harm that can be done to miners and to the environment. The struggle often is, what level of mitigation is enough?

The ethical organization is in business to provide some benefit or useful product to the public in general. In principle, it seeks to help the human condition in some tangible manner. To be sure it will not be perfect. Yet, it must make a good faith effort to ensure that its decisions and actions are responsible in facing known risks for harm and in seeking to provide a service or product that authentically helps human life.

An ethical organization acts responsibly to prevent serious harm to any of its stakeholders and to ensure it helps its stakeholders.

Think About It

Answer Box # 3

Thinking about the organization for which you currently work, now that you have these six tests, how would you assess its “ethical health?” Do you think most of its decisions and actions pass these six tests? If not, where would you locate its weaknesses in being an “ethical organization?”

An ethically fit or healthy organization makes good faith efforts to ensure that the well-being of all its stakeholders influences its conduct and performance. Organizations do not have an inner moral compass like the conscience found in individuals, so there some mechanisms need to be built into the organization that will represent and foster responsible, ethical conduct on the part of boards, management and employees.

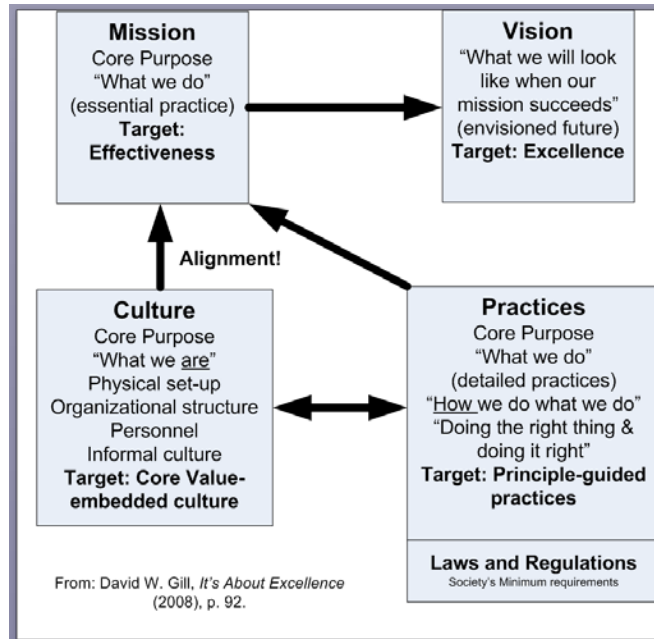
The benefits of being ethically fit as an organization are multiple, and some believe actually create conditions for higher levels of profitability and financial viability in the long term. When companies care for the right thing, not just the profitable and legal but also for the ethical they create real value and reputations that enables them to do well, not just to do good. We have listed some of the outcomes of a strong ethical ethos in an organization:

- Reduced unethical/illegal behavior by all of its stakeholders;
- Awareness of ethical/legal issues that enables it to avoid costly and embarrassing scenarios;
- Willingness to seek ethical/legal advice to grow in ethical and legal competency and compliance;
- Willingness to report wrongdoing when it occurs so that it is not allowed to become rooted in the organizational ethos;
- Willingness to take bad news to management knowing that management is serious about compliance;
- Use of values in judgment processes rather than a singular focus on profitability or reputation;
- Increase in employee commitment to the organization when they see it as a good place to work;
- Meeting external stakeholder expectations that often include ethical components.

B. Building an Ethically Healthy Organization

How do we create ethically fit organizations, organizations that not only articulate high standards of conduct *in principle* but live out those standards *in everyday practice and conduct*? There are always two sides to this. The documents, codes of conduct and core values are stated as those things to which the organization is committed. These are important; they are explicit statements by which the organization can be held accountable and judged. However, there is also conduct—the protocols, practices, informal ethos and events that show that the written statements are living documents. When its principles are “living,” the organization actually shapes its decisions and conduct in terms of those stated principles. It is an ethical organization, not only in espoused principles but also in actual everyday practice. What helps us create an ethically fit organization whose principles and practices are thoroughly ethical?

When we think about the organization in terms of its mission and vision, we remember that all is done in service of mission and vision accomplishment. The diagram to the side provides a helpful snapshot of the relationships between ethics and key elements of the organization. There is a reciprocal interplay between the organization’s culture (what we are) and its everyday practices (what we do). Both are in service of accomplishing the mission (with effectiveness) and vision (with excellence).



The challenge is alignment. Does the culture and do the practices enhance our effectiveness and excellence? At this point, we are taking for granted that we have a worthy mission and a realistic vision. It also indicates that we are looking for more than society’s minimum requirements as embodied in laws and regulations. Legal requirements set a boundary beyond which we must not go, but they do not create the higher standards of what is ethical. Ethically fit organizations have a clear set of important and strong core values that are embedded in the culture of the organization. In addition, we discover a range of principles that govern the practices and policies that are carried out regularly in the everyday life and activities of the members of that organization. How do we create such cultures and practices?

1) Objectives in building an organization with high ethical standards and performance⁷

In adopting a series of steps or a strategy to enhance the ethical performance of an organization, much depends upon the outcomes that leadership seeks from such steps. There are three major objectives, each matching an approach that is taken. All three can, individually or in some combination and emphasis, be incorporated into an organization.

a) Managing for Compliance

One major objective is to avoid any conduct or decision that is illegal or that violates company policies and negatively affects its interests. This is the minimal step that an organization can take. It puts in place a number of measures designed to insure compliance by its stakeholders to the legal requirements and to the espoused core values and stated code of conduct. This usually involves some sort of auditing of behavior in a variety of areas to see where deviance from standards is taking place. Strong, effective procedures and clear-cut standards are put in place for enforcing conduct in compliance and dealing with violations.

This may involve an ethics committee to give guidance in ethical matters, an ethics officer to head the compliance effort or an ethics hotline where violations can be reported or confidential advice on ethics-related situations can be dispersed. The typical measures taken include the following:

- Mandatory ethics training programs for employees and managers;
- Available, safe, confidential means for people reporting violations of ethics or law (hotlines, special email address);

⁷ S. Rao Vallabhaneni, *Corporate Management, Governance, and Ethics: Best Practices* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2008). A publication of the Association of Professionals in Business Management. Pp. 85-86.

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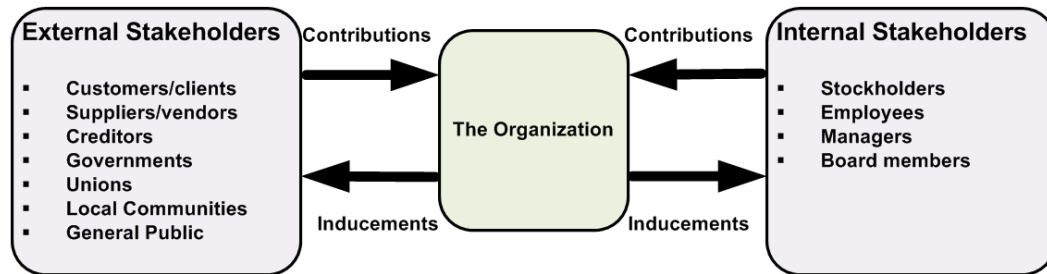
- Annual or more frequent audits of each manager's effort to uphold ethical standards and reports on actions taken to remedy deficient conduct and fix the factors leading to such violations;
- Annual statement signed by all employees certifying they have complied with the organization's code of conduct;
- Visible and serious action to remedy violations including and up to dismissal when the violation is serious enough.

The main goal of these measures is not to punish violations but to encourage and ensure compliance with all the relevant standards established by the organization. The strengths of this approach are clear standards and penalties for violations. The weakness of this approach is that it often addresses too few issues, does not empower stakeholders to creatively solve dilemmas and leads to an impression that minimum compliance is all that is important. At times it fosters the attitude that what is not forbidden is permitted. Rules proliferate!

b) Managing Stakeholder relations

A second major objective is to satisfy the concerns of various stakeholders. This aims at capturing the benefits that come from having a reputation for high ethical conduct. It seeks to develop and maintain good relations with various stakeholders over the long term by understanding their standards and ethical concerns and addressing them. It is in the self-interest of the organization to monitor the opinions and concerns of its stakeholders to develop initiatives that address their ethical concerns.

Stakeholders are individuals or groups with an interest, claim or stake in the organization, in what it does and how well it performs. In the chart accompanying this paragraph, you can see they are divided into external and internal stakeholders.



All of these stakeholders are in an exchange relationship with the organization. That is, they supply the organization with important resources or services, and in exchange, each stakeholder expects some of its interests to be satisfied by some inducement or reward. Were we to modify this diagram for the not-for-profit we would add "donors" of various sorts as key stakeholders.

For example, stockholders provide an enterprise with risk capital and in exchange expect the organization to maximize return on their investment. Creditors provide an organization with capital in the form of a debt and expect the organization to repay it with interest. Donors make gifts to an organization in trust that it will use the money as designated for some cause in such a way that it has maximum impact. Customers provide organizations with revenues in exchange for what they hope are safe, high quality, reliable products that provide value for the money. Employees bring labor and skills to an organization and expect in exchange commensurate wages, job satisfaction, job security and good working conditions. Local communities provide organizations with local infrastructures and in exchange want organizations that are good citizens in their role in the local community.

Organizations must take into account these interests and implicit (sometimes explicit) expectations when formulating strategy and embodying practices. If they do not, the stakeholders may withdraw their support and contributions, finding other alliances and employers who will provide a better track record in meeting stakeholder expectations. Typical things done in stakeholder management include the following:

- Defining who are the important organizational stakeholders;
- Identifying stakeholders' interests, concerns and likely claims they will make on the organization;
- Designing programs or initiatives to address stakeholder interests and claims;
- Auditing the effectiveness of stakeholder programs.

The reality is that not all stakeholder concerns and expectations can be met, but being sensitive to their interests and concerns can help shape the standards developed for guiding and judging organizational performance and behavior. The strengths of this approach are the clear payoffs for shaping the organization in ways that stakeholders prefer. It provides leadership with a clear picture of stakeholder expectations and attitudes that may be strategic for success. The weaknesses of this approach include

the changeability of stakeholder views over time, the probability of incongruent expectations from different stakeholder groups and a lack of clear values behind conduct (acting to please some stakeholder's value at the price of other important values).

c) Creating a value-based organization

A third major objective is to create an organizational culture and climate within which each manager and employee pursues a set of ethical and social values to which the organization is firmly committed. Many organizations have found that compliance measures are not enough because you simply cannot spend the resources and time needed to monitor all that needs to be monitored. If people have not internalized and embraced the core values and ethical standards, they will "cheat" when it is in their self-interest. In like manner, stakeholder differences create dilemmas where interests and concerns conflict or change over time. The organization needs to be cognizant of and sensitive to those interests, but more importantly, it needs to have a clear set of values that do not change with stakeholder changes.

Most organizations see the installation of a strong ethical culture in the organization as a better means for management. Culture drives behavior; behavior drives habits, and habits deliver results. That is the simple and short way of indicating the importance and power of organizational culture.

By defining clear values, articulating codes of conduct and employing creativity and effort, value-based organizations seek to create culture change. By allowing their values and ethical standards to permeate all aspects of the organization, they find monitoring and enforcement becomes second nature. Colleagues do it to each other, and new employees learn from their work-mates what is tolerable and what is not. They develop a reputation for being a company or organization that not only believes in ethical integrity but also practices it.

The strengths of this approach are that it bolsters organizational culture, creating a strong sense of identity and distinctiveness. It also produces long-term positive effects, with compliance to standards becoming second nature ("That's just how we do things here!"). The weaknesses are that there is a long-term wait for some of the benefits, some significant costs of implementation and the possibility that members of the organization will interpret the standards and values in their own way.

As you might guess, we favor this third approach. While it can be blended with aspects of the first two objectives, this is the "gold" standard in organizational fitness for ethics. A company that has to continually struggle with compliance issues on the part of its primary stakeholders or shifts with the changes in stakeholder attitudes and concerns is not ethically mature. The issues of the "culture" of the organization and the "climate" of working relationships are critical marks of an ethically healthy organization. What do we look for in a strong, ethically healthy organizational culture? David W. Gill suggests the following ten traits:

Gill's Ten Traits of Ethically Healthy Organizations

1. **Loyalty**—*Tenaciously preserve core mission and vision; hang in there with the team; no traitors.*
2. **Openness and Humility**—*Teachability from top to bottom of organization; no arrogant know-it-alls.*
3. **Accountability and Responsibility**—*All individuals and teams stand up; no blaming, no excuses.*
4. **Freedom**—*Creative risk-taking encouraged; no micro-managing control freaks.*
5. **Ethics and Excellence**—*Insatiable hunger for both "doing the right thing" and "doing things right."*
6. **Mistake Tolerance**—*Learn and try again; avoid punitive, fearful, repressive reactions.*
7. **Honesty, Integrity, and Transparency**—*Consistency of thought, talk, and walk; no hidden agendas or evasions.*
8. **Collaboration and Integration**—*Bringing people together...bringing ideas together.*
9. **Courage and Persistence**—*Guts in the face of difficulty.*
10. **Joyfulness & Fun**—*Stay positive even in hard times.*

David W. Gill, *It's About Excellence: Building Ethically Healthy Organizations*, (Executive Excellence

Beyond these objectives and measures, there are several other matters to which one needs to attend as one works on building an ethically healthy value-based organization.

- Favor hiring and promoting people who have well-grounded personal values and ethics, whose performance and advocacy indicates they are people of integrity. You would expect an ethically fit organization to either change or dismiss people who do not fit their strong commitment to ethical conduct.
- Codes of conduct and ethical policies need to be clear, consistent and "living" (that is, they need to be talked about, celebrated and modeled). The senior leadership needs to take the lead in championing the core values of the organization.

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- All people in the organization's stakeholders need to be informed and trained in the ethical expectations and requirements that the organization follows.
- Part of the incentive and reward system within the organization needs to be based on ethical conduct.
- Ethical considerations need to be an integral part of decision-making processes from the overall strategic planning to the action plans for carrying out specific projects.
- Moral courage needs to be a quality throughout the organization. This enables leaders to walk away from decisions that may be profitable but morally questionable; employees to say no to supervisors who ask unethical conduct from them; employees to have the integrity to blow the whistle on persistent unethical conduct in an organization.
- A strong governance structure needs to be in place and be effective. Among the major measures this includes:⁸
 - A board of directors (or trustees) composed of a majority of outsiders who have no management responsibilities in (or business ties with) the organization and are willing to hold top management accountable to not only financial and missional outcomes but also ethical conduct.
 - A board where the Chair of the Board and the CEO positions are held by separate individuals; the Chair of the Board should be an outside director.
 - A compensation committee of the board composed of all outside directors who are independent of the managers; this committee sets the compensation package for all top managers.
 - An audit committee of the board which reviews the finances of the organization composed of outside directors.
 - An auditing firm that is truly independent and does not have a conflict of interest.

There is much more that needs to be said on this subject matter, but it would take several more units. We are not going to do that, but we do want to offer a model of the sorts of things that need to be taken into account in building an ethically fit organization. David W. Gill's chart below suggests the following four main tasks or processes:

- Identification,
- Education,
- Implementation,
- Evaluation.

Each of these needs to be done with regard to the following six components that are part of creating a value-based organization with an ethically strong culture: motivation, troubleshooting, mission-vision, culture, practices and leadership. It is suggestive, even if not definitive, of a number of things we need to think about as we lead our teams and organizations toward ethical fitness.

⁸ Not all of these following items are applicable to church boards but are applicable to NGOs, many not-for-profit and for-profit companies.

Gill's Job List for Building Ethically Healthy Organizations (p. 93, <i>It's all about Excellence</i>)				
4 Processes  6 Components 	Identification	Education	Implementation	Evaluation
Motivation: Why we care. A deep, thoughtful, convincing rationale for taking ethics seriously.	<i>Why should we be concerned about our ethics? What is at stake? Consequences?</i>	<i>Activities and initiatives to keep everyone awake, alert, and motivated.</i>	<i>Instructing, praising, rewarding, and disciplining in order to maintain the motivational edge.</i>	<i>Organizational Ethics Assessments. Focus groups; internal/external research; Personnel evaluation.</i>
Trouble-Shooting: How we manage crises and make decisions about dilemmas.	<i>What is our method and strategy for dealing with crises, dilemmas and quandaries?</i>	<i>Ethics training case analyses online and in classroom; staff discussions. Newsletter Q& A.</i>	<i>Get people involved in using the tools to research questions, discuss actual problems and find/invent resolutions.</i>	
Mission & Vision: Where we are going. Purpose, core business, and envisioned future.	<i>Why do we exist? What are our core purposes, our over-arching basic goals?</i>	<i>Statements posted everywhere; invoked, explained frequently.</i>	<i>Mission and vision brought up at strategy and planning meetings.</i>	
Culture: Who we are. The core values that shape our physical plant, policies, structures and atmosphere.	<i>What are the basic, defining, core characteristics of our organization? Our habits, our atmosphere, our style, our traits?</i>	<i>Values posted everywhere, explained, illustrated by management.</i>	<i>Create & strengthen concrete exhibitions of each core value; smash all misalignments.</i>	
Practices: How we do things we do. The principles and guidelines for our activities. Robust, reliable, principle-guided practices.	<i>What are the guidelines that keep our primary activities on track ethically? What is our code of conduct?</i>	<i>Ethics training online, in print, in class.</i>	<i>Bring up guidelines in new employee orientation and mentoring, staff meetings, bring activities into conformity.</i>	
Leadership: Who makes it happen. What systems sustain it? Gifted, effective leaders and systems in place and in training.	<i>How is responsibility for the organizational ethics distributed? Personnel, process, systems?</i>	<i>Make plain the organizational structure, lines of communication, accountability.</i>	<i>Set the example, inspire the people, hold people accountable. Encourage, reward, educate, discipline.</i>	

Think About It

Answer Box # 4

Thinking about the organization for which you currently work, how would you characterize its approach to ensuring ethical conduct on the part of its various stakeholders? What elements does it have in place to create an ethically fit organization?

2) Typical sorts of unethical conduct

Beyond understanding some of the components of ethically fit organizations, we need to know some of the more typical types of unethical conduct and their motivation. No matter how ethically fit we might be, people will still conduct themselves in ways that are unethical. The temptations are all too present, and sometimes the dilemmas are simply overwhelming, and people make thoughtless and careless decisions. What are some of the types and reasons for unethical conduct in organizations?

- a. Self-dealing: when managers or leaders find ways to feather their own nests with organizational funds. The amounts of money in the control of various employees and the vast array of means to reroute it to one's own uses means this is one of the most common forms of unethical conduct. The most dramatic tales are of large, successful companies, but it is found even in churches and NGOs.

The "Enron" of India is the story of Satyam Computer Services. It was founded in 1987 by R. Ramalinga Raju. It became one of the largest computer services companies serving aerospace and defense, banking, financial services and insurance, energy and utilities, life sciences and healthcare, manufacturing, chemicals and automotive companies, public services and education, retail and consumer packaged, telecom, infrastructure, media and entertainment and the semiconductor industry and travel. At its height it was said to have 53,000 employees and a presence in 60 countries.

On January 7, 2009, Ramalinga Raju resigned after notifying board members and the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) that Satyam's accounts had been falsified. While he claimed he had not benefited from the falsification, it was subsequently learned that there were only 40,000 employees and he had allegedly been withdrawing 200 million rupees monthly from the company, covering those phantom 13,000 employees. In US dollars that was nearly \$3.7 million a month.

- b. Information manipulation: when managers and leaders use their control over key organizational information to enhance their own financial position or to distort and hide information in order to portray the organization's performance in a more positive light than is the truth. Many of the recent accounting scandals have been connected to this (Enron, Satyam Computer Services), but it can also have to do with more than just financial information.

The large tobacco companies in the USA knew for years from their own research that smoking cigarettes was linked to lung cancer as well as a host of other health problems. They suppressed the internal research about the dangers of smoking. It led to a class action law suit on the basis that it broke tort law by promoting a product that they knew was harmful to health. The result of the subsequent litigation was a settlement that cost the tobacco companies \$260 billion.

- c. Anticompetitive behavior: normally this occurs by a market dominant organization which uses its near monopoly power to harm actual or potential competitors so as to increase its own long term prospects. It also may be that the large companies in the same business meet secretly to fix prices and collaborate to freeze smaller companies out of the marketplace.

Price fixing is an agreement between participants in a market to buy or sell a product, service or commodity at some fixed price. Or, they may maintain the market conditions such that the price is maintained at a given level by controlling supply and demand (such the cartel, OPEC, does with the supply of oil). The purpose of price fixing may be to push the price of a product as high as possible, leading to profits for all sellers, but it also may be to prevent the entry of other buyers/sellers into a market by pegging or discounting prices at a level that may put the less capitalized companies out of business. The defining characteristic of price fixing is any agreement regarding price, whether expressed or implied. Price fixing requires a conspiracy between two or more sellers or buyers so as to coordinate pricing for mutual benefit of the traders.

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A recent example is the two largest fine art auction companies in the world in the 1990s, Sotheby's and Christie's. Between them they controlled ninety percent of this market, which at that time was worth about \$4 billion annually. In good times, the commission ranged up to ten percent of the price of the sold item, but the 1990s showed a slump in that business sector. As a result of this, sellers were able to bargain each against the other and lower commissions to two percent.

In 1993, the two companies secretly agreed, after a series of clandestine meetings, to a nonnegotiable, fixed sliding scale of commissions by which both companies would abide. This deal meant commissions of ten percent on items sold for \$100,000 to two percent on \$5 million items and above. This continued for six years until this agreement was uncovered.

It contravened antitrust laws. The net result was a settlement of \$512 million by the two auction houses to deal with lawsuits brought by former clients and a \$45 million fine by the government. Several individuals went to jail and had to pay personal fines as well.

To be sure, in many countries this is not illegal conduct, but it does raise issues of fairness and justice, especially about the people who are harmed by this practice. There are clear ethical concerns involved. Where laws restrict price fixing, organizations need to be diligent to comply with clear laws and regulations having to do with anti-competitive behavior.

- d. Opportunistic exploitation: when a company or organization uses its power to unilaterally rewrite contracts of its suppliers or distributors in order to gain a more favorable position for them.

In the 1990s the aircraft builder, Boeing, entered into a ten-year contract with Titanium Metals Corporation to buy a given amount of titanium annually. In 2000, after Titanium Metals had invested \$100 million to expand its production capacity to meet this contract, Boeing demanded that the contract be renegotiated with the following two changes: lower price for the metal and end minimum purchase agreements. Boeing apparently thought they had enough power to push this change through because they were a major purchaser of this metal and Titanium Metal had so much invested in expanded capacity. It was not illegal, but it was unethical. Titanium sued, and Boeing had to settle by paying monetary damages of \$60 million, but they did get an amended contract. What was unethical was that sellers have a right to have buyers treat them openly, honestly and fairly. Boeing's conduct was a cynical way of seeking to lower its costs and wiggle out of a contractual agreement.

- e. Substandard working conditions: when managers underinvest in working conditions or pay workers below-market rates in order to reduce the costs of the organization.

This is a widespread problem because there are many economic incentives to cut corners by not spending money on safety or by not paying a living wage. Nike was a case we met earlier who discovered their sub-contractors were overworking and underpaying as well as allowing underage workers and unsafe working conditions to prevail. According to a National Labor Committee report in 2010, employees at a production line for Microsoft mouse, keyboard and Xbox controller units are being subjected to harsh working conditions, military style punishments, 15-hour working days and dirty dorm rooms in China.

Reports on the manufacturing of sports shoes in China indicate a number of difficult conditions:⁹

...workers often had a difficult time answering questions about overtime because it is hard for them to distinguish between a "normal work day" and overtime. When hired, the workers were told they had to work 12 hours a day. According to the Chinese Labour Law, the work day should only be eight hours long, and the four extra hours of work should be counted as overtime. However, the factories set the "normal" work day as 12 hours, and then add additional overtime work. Therefore, if a worker works a 15-hour day, she will usually say she worked three hours of overtime, when she really worked seven overtime hours.

Also, it is important to take into account that the interviews were conducted in June and early July, which workers told us are generally not peak season in the shoe factories. This means that while the work shifts reported here are already grueling, it is probable that during other months, when there is more work to be done, the workers work even longer hours and are given even fewer days off per month.

With respect to wages, one of the difficulties we encountered is that some workers are paid a set rate, while others are paid piece rate. Moreover, most workers are not even given their pay stubs, making it difficult for them to understand what hours they were paid and at what rate.

Several of the questions we asked refer to health and safety issues in the workplace. Most workers felt they did not need any protective clothing. However, it is important to understand that the workers may not be aware that

⁹ <http://www.corpwatch.org/article.php?id=3031> accessed Dec 3, 2010: "Making Shoes for Nike and Reebok" from the Asia Monitor Resource Centre and Hong Kong Christian Industrial Committee, published September 1st, 1997
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they need protective clothing. They are accustomed to working without such things as gloves and face masks.

Many workers did not consider the chemicals in their factories to be hazardous, but this is often a reflection of their lack of understanding about health and safety issues. One chemical, benzene, which is used in China as a glue in making sports shoes, can cause anemia and leukemia and is so toxic that it has been banned in the United States and many European countries. But the factories do not inform the workers of the contents of poisonous substances, so workers have no way of knowing the degree of harm done to their bodies.

Another issue we questioned workers about is whether they were forced to pay a deposit upon being hired at the factory, which is not legal. Many workers answered that they did not pay a deposit. However, in most cases, workers were simply not paid for the first month of work, which amounts to a deposit. Though the factory promises that these deposits will at some point be returned to them, this is often not the case. Workers also answered that they were allowed to make complaints to supervisors or a complaints box, but most workers have never made complaints themselves because they are afraid of the consequences.

- f. Environmental degradation: when an organization takes actions that directly or indirectly result in pollution or other forms of environmental harm.

The Bhopal disaster in India is a case in point. More than 8,000 people were killed in the 1984 disaster, and 500,000 people were exposed to dangerous chemicals. In studies up to 2009 (by 13 different agencies) the old Union Carbide site has been documented as continuing to leak damaging chemicals into the water drunk by more than 30,000. The site itself has not been cleaned up, and soil samples show significant contamination. Lead, mercury, arsenic, chromium, cadmium, chloroform, carbon tetrachloride, chlorobenzenes and carbonate pesticides have been detected in soil and water samples at above safe levels. Dow (now the owner of Union Carbide) continues to dither with the measures and costs necessary to rectify this environmental disaster, some 26 years after the event. Being “green” is often little more than a public relations gesture toward governmental and public attitudes toward the environment.

- g. Corruption: when an organization through its agents pays bribes to gain access to lucrative contracts or to avoid implementing regulations of the law that are costly or accepts kickbacks in order to issue a contract.

This is one of the most entrenched and difficult ethical challenges. Among the many corrupt practices facing organizations, endemic bribery is cited more often than any other. The claim is often made that in many parts of the world, the context is so corrupt that ordinary activities of businesses and other organizations cannot be done without paying bribes.

We need to note that there is no country where bribery is publically justified as ethically proper. Bribery undercuts the efficiency of the marketplace, siphons off money that was destined to create facilities and utilities to serve the broader public, often imposes unfair costs on third parties and leads to further corruption since such costs cannot be reported (they are often illegal) and so must be accounted for in falsified book entries, can lead to disastrous results when products are not up to standards (such as low standard building materials contributing to many deaths when buildings supposedly earthquake proof collapse), and so on.

Studies indicate that bribery occurs most frequently in (1) public works contracts and construction, (2) the arms and defense industry and (3) the oil and gas industry. The most recent report of Transparency provided a picture of the impact of corruption on a variety of private sector goods.

The overall impact of corrupt business practices, which allow companies to operate beyond the reach of the law, may be visible and imminent—such as water scarcity in Spain, exploitative work conditions in China, illegal logging in Indonesia, unsafe medicines in Nigeria and poorly constructed buildings that collapse with deadly consequences in Turkey. Many other adverse effects are more hidden, but no less harmful, such as inflated costs for a public contract, a biased judicial ruling or the nurturing of a kleptocratic political class that plunders the public wealth of a country. Even small payments made to “get things done” are harmful, as they are funneled up through the system and help sustain corrupt bureaucracies, parties and governments.¹⁰

¹⁰ The *Global Corruption Report 2009* (Transparency International/Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 5. See: http://www.transparency.org/publications/gcr/gcr_2009 Accessed Dec 3, 2010.

Think About It

Answer Box # 5

This list of typical unethical behaviors is not meant to be exhaustive. Do you find these behaviors typical in your context? What others ones would you list as commonly found in your context?

3) Troubleshooting and Ethical Crises

What do we do when we face an ethical crisis? How do we manage the process of identifying and then mitigating conduct and decisions that are unethical?

The first thing to be done is to recognize that there is a problem. These are the first two steps of the RESOLVEDD method: **R**eview the history/situation and then identify the **E**thical issues that are involved. We have given you a list of six questions to ask in order to recognize how serious the issue is that the organization is confronting.

The second thing is to strategize about the essential actions to take. What must I do about the problem I see? With whom can I consult or share information? What are the options and possibilities? About what should I be especially careful as I move forward? Is this something I need to report to the appropriate authorities right away?

The third thing is to take steps to analyze the possible solutions. Here we engage the SOLVE part of the RESOLVEDD method: identify the major **S**olutions, the likely **O**utcomes of each solution, the **V**alues that are upheld or violated by each solution, and an **E**valuation of each main solution against other possible solutions. We are checking the facts again, looking for various ways of handling the matter along with the values each manner preserves (and sacrifices) and then ranking them in some way. This is a time to be creative and collaborative (if possible).

The next to last step is to **D**ecide what you and the organization will do. You will need also to decide how it will be implemented and communicated (and how you will **D**efend the action taken).

The last step is to carry out any reforms that might be necessary to lessen the chances that such an ethical crisis will recur in the future. This might involve changes in the process, the structure, the culture or even personnel. We need to ask what precipitated the unethical conduct and what can we, as an organization, do to mitigate those precipitating factors. We may need to revise our code of conduct. We may need to look at our hiring practices and how we screen to ensure we are securing personnel who are ready to commit to our values and ethics and live by them. We may need to institute a change in our training program.

In Appendix C you will find a document created by the organization, Harris & Associates. It gives their "Guidelines for Dealing with Ethical Misconduct." This is only one example of an organization which has thought through a procedure for dealing with ethical misconduct in a serious and careful manner.

Think About It

Answer Box # 6

How has your organization handled ethical misconduct? Does it have a set of procedures spelled out for handling ethical crises? What are they?

We've come a long way in a short time. There is much more that could be dealt with in a unit such as this. We want you to think creatively and clearly about ways in which your organization can become more ethically fit in the future. In closing, we want to give you a list from one of the Christian groups that works full-time to think about ethics in the workplace. This list is from Seattle Pacific University's Center for Integrity in Business in the School of Business and Economics. They publish an e-magazine, Ethix (<http://blog.spu.edu/ethix/>) from which this list comes.

Eight Traits of a Healthy Organizational Culture¹¹ October 1, 2009

Any good organization must have an inspiring, shared mission at its core—and it must have capable leadership in place and in development. Assuming these two factors are present, the following eight traits define a healthy corporate or organizational culture.

1. **Openness and humility from top to bottom of the organization**
Arrogance kills off learning and growth by blinding us to our own weaknesses. Strength comes out of receptivity and the willingness to learn from others
2. **An environment of accountability and personal responsibility**
Denial, blame and excuses harden relationships and intensify conflict. Successful teams hold each other accountable and willingly accept personal responsibility.
3. **Freedom for risk-taking within appropriate limits**
Both extremes—an excessive, reckless risk-taking and a stifling, fearful control—threaten any organization. Freedom to risk new ideas flourishes best within appropriate limits.
4. **A fierce commitment to “do it right”**
Mediocrity is easy; excellence is hard work, and there are many temptations for shortcuts. A search for excellence always inspires both inside and outside an organization.
5. **A willingness to tolerate and learn from mistakes**
Punishing honest mistakes stifles creativity. Learning from mistakes encourages healthy experimentation and converts negatives into positives.
6. **Unquestioned integrity and consistency**
Dishonesty and inconsistency undermine trust. Organizations and relationships thrive on clarity, transparency, honesty and reliable follow-through.
7. **A pursuit of collaboration, integration, and holistic thinking**
Turf wars and narrow thinking are deadly. Drawing together the best ideas and practices, integrating the best people into collaborative teams, multiplies organizational strength.
8. **Courage and persistence in the face of difficulty**
The playing field is not always level, or life fair, but healthy cultures remain both realistic about the challenges they face and unintimidated and undeterred by difficulty.

Models: Joseph

Read: Genesis 39, 45:1-5, 50:15-26; Hebrews 11:21-22.

Bible reading: Read the above biblical texts before continuing the module below

This is a major story in Genesis, far more details of this unusual man than we can read and take in. Most of us probably remember the major outline of his life—the early favoritism shown by his father, Jacob, and the jealousy of his brothers; the sale of him to the passing merchants that ended with his slavery in Egypt; the unjust imprisonment of Joseph due to the false accusation of rape by Potiphar’s wife; the dream-interpretation gift of Joseph that brought him to the attention of Pharaoh and position of Vizier over Egypt; the management of the famine so that “all the world” came to Egypt to buy food; the return of his brothers during the famine and their testing by Joseph’s tricks; the reunion with his father. Joseph believed the word that one day all his family would return to Palestine, so at his death he charged that his bones be carried up with Israel when that happened. (Hebrews 11:22)

There are a number of critical turning points on which we might focus—his temptation to advance himself when Potiphar’s wife sought to seduce him (Genesis 39:6b-10); his opportunity to advance himself as a great magician and claim the power of dream interpretation for himself rather than his God (Genesis 41:16); his temptation to nurse anger and vengeful feelings toward his brothers and then his eventual chance at revenge on the brothers who had sold him into captivity (Genesis 42-44; 50:15-21). Not much is said about it, but one can also imagine the temptation to throw over his Semitic identity and simply take on Egyptian identity and beliefs.

Joseph is unusual in that this is one of the few stories of one of God’s people being raised to the highest levels of governmental power in nations other than Israel—yet remaining faithful (one thinks of Moses, Daniel, Nehemiah and Esther). Life at these exalted levels has many opportunities and temptations. The function of Joseph in this part of history was to preserve Israel, paving the way for them to migrate and live in Egypt for several generations.

What is impressive about each of these leaders who served in high places in these foreign governments is their readiness for that role. We know more about Joseph, Moses and Daniel than about Nehemiah and Esther. What is common to those first three is the time it took for them to become ready. By the time they were in positions of high authority, they had had years of habit and character formation. They had made choices and become experienced in small faithfulness, wisdom and courage. They had

¹¹ <http://blog.spu.edu/ethix/2009/10/01/eight-traits-of-a-healthy-organizational-culture/> accessed May 15, 2010.

Organizations and Ethical Decision Making: Unit 10 - What is Involved in the Ethics of Organizations?

acquired inner dispositions that were settled and strong so that when they moved up to a much broader range of responsibility (and temptation), they were ready.

- **His ethical challenge:** To use his position and power for good.
- **His ethical action:** To put his family and the interests of others above his own sense of being treated unfairly.
- **His temptation:** To use his power to take vengeance on those who had inflicted injustice on him.
- **The cost of his doing what was right:** To absorb the pain of injustice and to forgive—to return good for evil.
- **The reward of his doing what was right:** To be reunited with his father, brothers and sisters so they might be preserved.

One question some ask about Joseph's conduct has to do with the selling of the stores of grain and foodstuff. While Joseph managed to provide survival for many in a time of great famine, the cost (at least for many Egyptians) was resettlement into the cities and some sort of additional servitude to the Pharaoh. Did he leverage a "monopoly" over a critical resource so as to enslave a broad population in an unjust manner? Is this one of the worst examples of "price fixing" in human history? (See Genesis 47, especially vs. 20-26). What do we say about the "ethics" of Joseph and the Pharaonic dynasty he served? Do you think his use of the food crisis to secure all the land, except the priestly land, for Pharaoh and then to gain some type of servitude or serfdom status for most Egyptians (the Hebrew says "enslaved") was a good, ethical action?

Think About It

Answer Box # 7

How would you sum up the ethical character and conduct of Joseph?

Summary

This unit has focused on the organizational level, exploring facets of what it takes for an organization to engage ethical issues. We noted that there are four types of actions that make up a range of important actions: economic, legal, ethical and discretionary. To be a good "citizen" an organization must meet obligations involved in all four in ways that develop its reputation as a place of work and productivity. Our focus has been on the ethical obligations faced by organizations. We suggested six questions that enable one to identify whether and with what level of seriousness an ethical issue is involved in some decision or action. Then we sketched some considerations involved in developing an organization that is in principle committed to high ethical standards and in practice performs to those standards consistently. We looked at three somewhat different objectives in building such an organization and concluded the best objective is an organizational culture that permeates the whole from the workplace to the board room, though it may incorporate elements of compliance and stakeholder relations. We reminded ourselves of some of the typical sorts of organizational unethical conduct seen throughout a wide range of organizations. Lastly, we touched briefly on how using the RESOLVEDD method fits into troubleshooting and managing ethical misconduct and crises. Joseph was our biblical model who displays one of the characteristics of a great leader. He did much to be admired as a man with character of high ethical standards and conduct, and yet some things don't look like the best possible outcomes from some of his decisions.

Unit 10 Final Assignment

Final Assignment

1. Write on one to two pages your thoughts about what you think your organization might do to either build or strengthen its organizational culture and become known for integrity, fairness, accountability and just dealings with all of its stakeholders.
2. On another one to two pages write about the key challenges you face daily or less frequently as a Christian leader in your workplace or organization in terms of being a person of integrity and consistently good ethical conduct. What do you do about the pressures in your context to engage in decisions or conduct that you sense violates Christian ethical standards?
3. Please confirm that you have discussed the results of your interactive work in Unit 10 ("Think About It" boxes) with a group of two other people. (See "Note on Process" on page v in the "Expectations for the Course" section on the Introduction to the Course.)
4. Have you read Stott pp. 217-268 (The World of Work; Business Relationships)? What did you find most helpful? What did you wish he had dealt with that is not in his account? What did you find that you felt needed correction or maybe wasn't quite right? Write another page of reflection.

When your work is complete (three to five pages total), send a copy to your facilitator via email as an attachment. Please send it by the date indicated in the Module Calendar.

Appendix A: Some Web Links for Organizational Ethics

Ethics Resource Center: <http://www.ethics.org/>

Ethics and Policy Integration Centre: <http://www.ethicaledge.com/introduction.html>

Ethics Institute of South Africa: <http://www.ethicsa.org>

BizEthics.org: <http://bizEthics.org>

Appendix B: Criteria for Developing a Code of Conduct

The Toronto Resolution¹²

We present a methodology for assessing particular ethical codes which comprises the key elements that all codes of ethics in science and scholarship should include. By suggesting that codes adopt a common Preamble, and that they consider addressing common elements to their codes, we are expressing our hope that the community of scholars and scientists can agree to a common moral framework for the conduct of their investigations. Each discipline should develop a particular code in the light of these considerations, and existing codes should be examined for their adequacy, effectiveness and applicability.

I. Preamble:

Living in a world in which all forms of life are interdependent, we recognize that human activity since the scientific revolution now threatens much of the life on our planet. This threat stems in part from reckless exploitation of the earth's resources and massive pollution of the biosphere by humankind, exacerbated by rampant militarism. To help solve these problems, scientists and scholars, and all those concerned with the welfare of life on earth, need to unite in a world-wide moral community, in which considerations of beneficence and justice at a global level are fundamental. We recognize that knowledge gives power; that power tends to corrupt and may be used for dangerous and destructive purposes; and that consequently scientists and scholars, who share the privilege of participating in the advancement of knowledge, many under the shelter of academic freedom and in the tradition of open publication, have a particular responsibility to society for the effects of their work. All should make a determined individual and collective effort to foresee the implications and possible consequences of their scholarly and scientific

¹² <http://www.iseepi.org/about/toronto.html> Accessed May 15, 2010 The Toronto Resolution was formulated at a Workshop on "Ethical Considerations in Scholarship and Science" held in Toronto, November 8 and 9, 1991, which was cosponsored by: New College, Victoria University, University College and the Centre for Bioethics in the University of Toronto, Norman Bethune College and MacLaughlin College in York University and Science for Peace.

work, and avoid studies that are likely to harm the quality of life. We should recognize that knowledge also gives enlightenment and promises emancipation from disease, poverty and other social evils. As an alert and enlightened community of experts and concerned citizens, scientists and scholars should participate in the social process of directing their research and its applications to benign ends, while educating their students and the public concerning this, the proper role of scholarly and scientific knowledge.

II. Elements of Codes Ethics

Considering the existence of numerous codes of ethics, most being specific to a single discipline and often to the scientists and scholars in only one country; Considering the difficulty of expressing in a single code the concerns of scientists and scholars in various disciplines and in different countries; Considering that war is obsolete, at best futile and at worst destructive beyond comprehension or tolerance, and that the present level of direct military research is unprecedented, with human, physical and financial resources being thus diverted away from the proper ends of science and scholarship:

1. a code should articulate as far as possible the underlying assumptions and guiding principles of a working ethic;
2. a code should indicate specific measures designed to ensure that signatories adhere to its principles;
3. a code should be sufficiently general to encompass scholarly work and basic, applied and technological research as well as the actions of practitioners engaged in the discipline or profession;
4. a code should oppose prejudice with respect to sex, religion, national or ethnic origin, age, sexual preference, color, or physical or mental disability;
5. a code should take into account that, while in general it is difficult to anticipate all the consequences of research, scientists and scholars have a responsibility, individually and collectively, to try to foresee, and to keep themselves aware of, the developing applications of their work, and to choose or redirect it accordingly;
6. a code should recognize that actions designed narrowly to benefit humankind may in fact threaten the survival of all species, since the ecosystem is a seamless web;
7. a code should forbid research directed towards developing or using methods of torture, or other devices and techniques that threaten or violate individual or collective human rights;
8. a code should direct scholarly and scientific activity towards the peaceful resolution of conflict and universal disarmament; since all research has military potential, every scientist and scholar should seek to resolve the ethical problem that knowledge, which should enlighten and benefit humanity, may be used instead to harm the planet and its people in war and in preparation for war;
9. a code should encourage its adherents to comply with established procedures for the scientific and (where appropriate) ethical peer review of research studies conducted under its auspices and, where such procedures do not exist, a code should specify them;
10. a code should urge its adherents to make all basic research results universally available;
11. a code should urge its adherents to identify and report violations of its terms, and should correspondingly ensure their protection from retribution by their fellow scientists, professional and learned societies, and the judiciary for such exposure;
12. a code should be widely disseminated through the school and university curricula, to educate the rising generations, as well as practicing scientists and scholars, about their emerging responsibilities.

Appendix C: Guidelines for Dealing with Ethical Misconduct

Harris & Associates (Concord, California)¹³

What to do if you have an ethics question—or need to report a possible violation.

Step #1: Reflection: Is your concern important enough to take any action?

If you become aware of a possible ethics issue in our company (or on the part of a client or business partner we are working with), here are five test questions to help you determine if you should take action. If the answer is “Yes” to one or more of these five test questions, you should take action and make an inquiry or report. *It may not turn out to be a serious problem—but it is important to take action to find out.*

1. Is it illegal?

Any time you see something that might be breaking a legal or regulatory standard, report it.

2. Does it violate our company values and ethical guidelines?

Any time something may be in contradiction to one of our core values or be in violation of one of our ethical guidelines (or of a relevant professional ethical guideline, e.g., the code for civil engineering), report it.

3. Does it violate the Golden Rule or your internal sense of right and wrong?

If you wouldn't want it done to you, we probably shouldn't do it to others. If it really bothers your personal conscience and values, it probably would bother others. Report it.

4. Would we be doing this if it was the lead story in the news?

Individuals and companies doing wrong things usually try to hide what they are doing. If you wouldn't feel good about having the public know and see what we are doing, report it.

5. Could someone be seriously and irresponsibly harmed?

This is a bottom line question in ethics. If anyone could be seriously and irresponsibly harmed (physically, financially, reputationally, etc.), report it.

Step #2: Action: How should I report a question or possible violation?

If possible, start with the first three steps (below) to report and resolve ethical questions and challenges. If these steps seem dangerous, unwise, or unproductive, or you are not satisfied after pursuing them, move to any of the final three steps:

1. Speak to the offender(s).

It is not always possible to take your concerns to the (apparent) offender doing an unethical act. When possible, however, this is the place to begin.

2. Ask a trusted colleague for advice and help.

Sometimes ethical questions can be answered and problems resolved by simply discussing the matter with a colleague or two.

3. Report it to your supervisor.

Your supervisor is responsible for ethical as well as business matters. Unless the ethics question concerns your supervisor personally, or you remain unsatisfied with your supervisor's response, you should take the matter to him or her.

4. Report it to any supervisor or manager with whom you feel comfortable.

All managers and supervisors at Harris are available to all employees for ethics matters.

5. Report it to the Human Resources Manager.

The Human Resources Manager will always be available to provide help with your ethics questions and reports.

6. Report it to the President.

The President of Harris & Associates always has an open door for anyone who wishes to raise a question or make a report on any ethical matter.

You may submit your question or report anonymously by letter if you feel it necessary.

What happens to your ethics questions and reports?

- All ethics questions and reports of possible violations are taken very seriously by the company.
- There will be no retaliation for raising ethical questions or reporting possible violations; it is the obligation of every employee to report any violations and to protect the ethical health of the company.

¹³ David W. Gill, op. cit., pp. 72-73.

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- If your question or report is not anonymous and is submitted to a supervisor or manager (including the Human Resources Manager and President), it will be acknowledged in an appropriate and timely manner.
- If the issue can be resolved by the supervisor receiving the question or report, it will be addressed and resolved as quickly as possible and you will be informed of the decision and action.
- If the issue cannot be resolved quickly, easily, or satisfactorily by that supervisor you may be contacted for further discussion of the specific issue. The supervisor will consult with others on the management team, taking it as far as the President and Board of Directors, if necessary, until a satisfactory resolution can be found.
- A decision will be made by management, subject always to the approval of the Board, and corrective action will be taken to address the specific situation and those involved in it—and to reinforce or improve the policies, standards, and procedures of the company so as to minimize the possibility of such problems recurring.
- Unless the report was submitted anonymously, the reporting individual will receive a report on the company's resolution of the issue.

Ethics for Living and Leading

Unit 11

Reviewing the Ethics of Leadership



Development Associates International

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Unit 11 – Reviewing the Ethics of Leadership

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Learning Outcomes: By the end of this unit you will be able to:

- Evaluate the appropriateness of your conception of yourself and your own importance in relation to that of other Christians (and take a Moral Competency Inventory);
- Confront Jesus' teaching about the exercise of authority in the ministry of a Christian leader;
- Review what you have learned as you have taken this course.

Steps to Complete Unit 11

Read and Respond

Supplementary text: John R. W. Stott, Issues Facing Christians Today, 4th Edition (Zondervan, 2006). For Unit 11 read Stott, pp. 189-240 Human Rights; 389-417 Abortion and Euthanasia.

Lecture Notes & Workbook

Overview

In this last assigned unit we revisit the topic of the organization and the leader (which we initially explored in Unit 2). Given all we have learned about ethical standards and challenges, we want to raise once again the issue of the ethics of the leader.

The future is shaped by the quality of leadership. Without ethical leadership, nothing good will happen. Organizations can have a glorious past and wonderful resources, both financial, technical and personnel, but without the catalyst of wise, moral and mature leadership, it will not be able to realize its best potential.

This is a review unit in which we ask that you spend time reviewing the key things that you have learned in this module about ethics for living and leading. Our focus has been on ethics for leading organizations, so it has by no means engaged all the important topics for ethical reflection or the process by which you can become ethically fit. We began with that topic in Unit 2 by acknowledging that ethical fitness is not a matter of taking a course or completing a degree. It is a matter of lived experience, experience that is modeled and mentored, so that over time you acquire the wisdom and maturity to feel and act ethically. Ethical fitness comes from developing the habits of response that enable you to do with ease and pleasure that which is the will of God for your life in all situations and relationships.

Appendix B contains a new instrument designed to measure “moral intelligence.” By intelligence the authors do not mean “smarts” but rather qualities of thinking and action that shape a person’s sensitivity to moral issues as they lead. You may want to take the “test” just to see how appropriate it is for you in assessing your own ethical sensitivity.

Before we start the review, we want to remind you of two key relationships that determine the effectiveness of your leadership—your relationship to others and your relationship to power and authority.

I. Your attitude toward yourself - in relation to others (Romans 12:3-13)

Bible reading: Read the above biblical text before continuing the module below.

Much ethical analysis deals with visible actions that impact other people. Paul's teaching suggests that how we think is also an ethical issue. Jesus affirmed the importance of the thoughts of the heart as roots of ethical or unethical behavior. (Matthew 15:19-20) In Paul's teaching, how we think about ourselves in relation to others is a very important moral issue. One great temptation is to think too highly of ourselves to be pretentious in our attitudes. (Romans 12:3) This tendency will lead us to compare ourselves with others, to compete with others, to be jealous of others, and can easily break out into hostility and conflict with fellow believers.

Rather than think about how much better we are than others, Paul proposes a different attitude. He teaches that we are one body, that we each belong to one another, though our functions are not all the same. The way to think ethically in this area is first to discern what gifts we have received from God (sober judgment is needed here), second, to consider how we can exercise our gifts for the good of others and third, to use these gifts to the very best of our ability.

In following this path there is great satisfaction because we are no longer concerned about comparing ourselves with others but rather are concerned about what we can contribute to them. We don't need people's affirmation of how good we are or how much better we are than others. Instead, we seek to discern God's will for us and to do it with joy. The result is that loving and serving the Christian and larger civil community (Romans 12:9-13) through the exercise of our gifts both pleases the Lord and becomes a way of life in the Spirit.

Think About It

Answer Box # 1

1. Do you observe spiritual pretentiousness, jealousy and conflict in your Christian community? If so, what forms does it take?
2. Have you experienced feelings of jealousy yourself? What did it feel like?
3. Have you observed Christian brothers or sisters who seem to follow Paul's exhortation in Romans 12 to focus on the discernment and exercise of one's gifts for the benefit of the community without regard to recognition or reward?
4. How are you seeking to cultivate such an attitude?

There is also a moral and spiritual posture to learn from Jesus Christ when it comes to leading others. In this area of leadership it is very easy to think we are doing one thing when we are actually doing another. We need to be brutally honest with ourselves about how we lead. It is all too easy to fool ourselves and to lose the perspective about which Jesus spoke many times to his disciples. Let's look at two biblical passages and read the comments by Paul Mpindi on these texts and on other words of Jesus.

II. Leadership and the Exercise of Authority (Matthew 20:20-28; John 13:1-17)

Bible reading: Read John 13:1-17 before continuing the module below.

A conception of authority that is absolute, dominating and unwilling to serve was traditionally practiced by chiefs in Africa—and by leaders in Asia and North America. A tendency toward this type of exercise of authority was also evident in several of the kings of the Old Testament. A transformation of this notion of power and authority came with the explicit directions that the Lord Jesus Christ gave to his disciples. The self-centered request by the mother of James and John, two of the Lord's disciples, provides the context in which Christ disclosed his teaching on the exercise of power by his disciples.

In Matthew 20:20-28 the following account is narrated:

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus with her sons, bowing down and making a request of him. And he said to her, "What do you wish?" She said to him, "Command that in your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit one on your right and one on your left." But Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" They said to him, "We are able." He said to them, "My cup you shall drink; but to sit on my right and on my left, this is not mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father." And hearing this, the ten became indignant with the two brothers. But Jesus called them to himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

The teaching of Jesus on the exercise of power and authority begins with the contrast that he establishes between the attitude of the rulers of the world and the attitude of those who wish to exercise authority in the church. The Lord affirms that those who want to exercise power and authority must not do so as those of the world. The heads of the nations exercise power and authority by "tyrannizing" and "subjugating" their subjects.

This should not be the case in the context of the Church or Christian organizations. Instead of exercising power and authority through tyranny and subjugation, those who want to exercise authority must exercise it in service to others. According to the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, Christian power is exercised in becoming a "servant," a "slave" of others. The Lord anchors this teaching in his own person: "just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

Review of Ethics: Unit 11 – Reviewing the Ethics of Leadership

The teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ modifies the idea of political, social, economic and spiritual greatness. According to Christ, he who wishes to become greater than others must do it in humbling himself, in becoming their servant. In Matthew 23:11 the Lord affirms, "But the greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted." (See also Mark 9:35; 10:43.)

In the account of John 13:1-17 where Jesus washes the feet of his disciples, the Lord teaches the humility that should characterize his disciples through taking the responsibility and form of a slave. He commands his disciples, those on whom will rest the responsibility of the propagation and direction of the Church, to imitate him. If he, the divine master humbles himself and places himself at the same level as a slave, how much more should his disciples humble themselves in their leadership? The disciples are commanded by Christ to guide his Church in becoming servants of others.

Thus, in the New Testament, the motif of the "servant" becomes the model to follow in the exercise of power and authority. In other words, the leaders must not in any case dominate and be served by the Christian community. To the contrary, because they are placed in a position of authority, the Christian leaders must voluntarily deny themselves, must renounce the pursuit of their own interests and apply themselves to the pursuit and service of the interests of the people of God placed, not below them, but above them. The renunciation of self, humility and service become the essential characteristics of Christian leadership.

Once again we see that the ethical path is not the easy path, but it is the right one, the one that reflects the character of Christ and the will of God. May God help us to lead as ethical servants, not as corrupt tyrants. We desperately need models of this kind of leadership that is seldom seen in the leadership of the world around us. These words of Jesus are a challenge for you to be that kind of leader.

Think About It

Answer Box # 2

Here's an inventory:

- ___ 1. As a servant-leader, have you too high an opinion of yourself? (See I Corinthians 4:7)
- ___ 2. Do you have sufficient respect for your colleagues?
- ___ 3. Do you lead by collaboration and consultation?
- ___ 4. Do you encourage the development of your colleagues? (John 3:30)
- ___ 5. Are you able to recognize your faults and ask for forgiveness?
- ___ 6. Do you have a reputation for honesty and for avoiding arbitrary decisions?
- ___ 7. Are you in the process of preparing for your succession instead of holding on endlessly to your power?

In these two biblical threads, we return to the model of servant leadership that governs our vision of leaders of integrity and effectiveness. This course in ethics is one of the tools needed by the servant leader to be clothed with integrity and to produce Kingdom effects. Only as we lead by example and lead from a posture of humility and integrity will we find that place where we image Christ in his leadership.

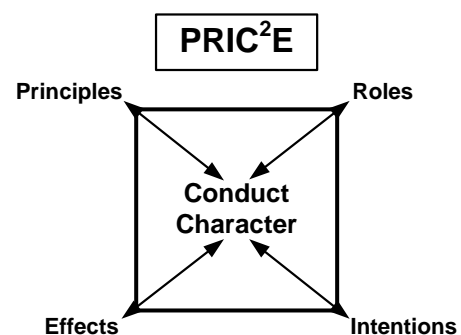
III. Review of Ethics for Living and Leading

In this section we remind you of the course you have run in studying Ethics for Living and Leading. This will give you a chance to review and integrate a number of the things you have been learning from the reading and exercises.

A. Introduction to Ethics

Unit 1: What is ethics?

In this unit we defined and distinguished ethics from other important features of human bonds (etiquette and law). We also reviewed the Western classical Christian tradition in ethics to discover its major ways of thinking about what is right and wrong. We discovered also that the biblical material uses all five of the ways of thinking found in traditional Christian ethics—Principles, Roles, Intentions, Conduct, Character and Effects. The graphic to the right was an attempt to capture this overview of ethical theories and emphases.



Our perspective underlined character as the final goal (wise, mature, ethical) with conduct as the principle focus of most ethical considerations. It is clear that all five of these components contribute to a fully developed consideration of ethics.

John Stott raised for us the question of Christian involvement in the larger social and political world, reciting the recovery of social concerns in Western evangelicalism. He advocates that Christians, under the Lordship of Christ, cannot neglect or ignore that which Christ claims. Justice and social engagement are not optional for Christian ethical conduct

Think About It

Answer Box # 3

Take some time and quickly skim through Unit 1. Write down the key things that impress you as important to learn from this unit.

Unit 2: How do leaders become ethically fit?

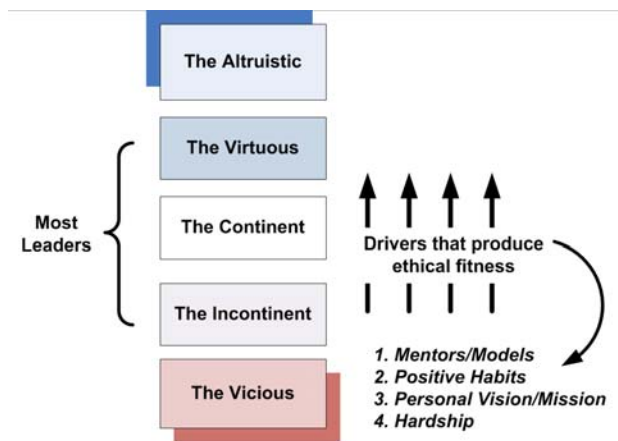
After understanding the nature and importance of ethics, we moved to the heart of the matter—you, as the leader. In this module we focused on our primary objective: *the formation of an ethically fit leader*. This unit was about character and its formation with key virtues. We started with the puzzle of Ted Haggard.

We must admit that our character is not fully developed with the full range of virtues. We are partly prudent, mostly courageous, nearly just in our dealings and so on. We are still on our way to the full development of the qualities that mark the Transformational and Servant Leader. We reviewed those models of leadership briefly to be reminded again that both underscore ethical or moral leadership as crucial to authentic leadership. For Christians, these two models are a good fit for what we understand are the leadership principles Jesus gave us. We are not born with ethical maturity or fitness. It is something that can develop through time with proper guidance and experience.

The classical Christian tradition models the ethical formation of the leader in terms of a movement from immaturity and folly to maturity and wisdom. The roots of the model came from Aristotle, but it was adapted by many Christian writers over the centuries—running from the altruistic to the virtuous, the continent, the incontinent and finally the vicious

We looked at four of the many elements that enable us to grow and become more skillful in our ethical perspective and conduct—connecting with mentors and models, developing our own personal mission and values, developing strong positive habits and learning from hardship. Rebekah served as our last biblical model, showing us a mixed picture of a strong, independent, decisive person who also used deception and favoritism within her family. Most leaders we know are mixed in their ethical fitness. God is still able to work with us in order to accomplish God’s redemptive purposes. That is grace!

John Stott’s chapter, “A Call for Christian Leadership” lamented the death of strong Christian leadership. He outlined the following five essentials for such leadership: vision, industry, perseverance, service and discipline.



Think About It

Answer Box # 4

Take some time and quickly skim through Unit 2. Write down the key things that impress you as important to learn from this unit.

B. Ethical Foundations

Unit 3: How do ethics fit into the Christian life?

We began our probing of the Bible in this unit, looking for the foundations provided by the Bible for thinking and living ethically. Our beginning point was the following simple summary assertion:

The sum of Christian ethics is simply this: “God wants his moral and spiritual character (and behavior) replicated in his people. As God is holy, just, righteous, loving, compassionate, merciful, and so on, he expects his people to be.”

Little can be added to that except to fill in the details and describe some of the process by which this happens in us. The Bible provides basic answers to worldview questions such as where did we come from (origins), what happened to us (the destructive entrance and presence of sin), what is the solution (God’s plan for our salvation) and where are we headed (the coming triumph of God in Creation and judgment on sin). This large framework enables us to see our own culture’s worldview in perspective.

We took a quick, grand tour of the “speaking” of God to us in the Bible, looking at each of the major bodies of revelation and their contribution to a fully developed Christian ethics. They are like a great symphony, with each body of writings providing us something essential that we need in order to be fully equipped to know and do the will of God:

The word God gives us from all of Scripture: inspired to equip us (2 Timothy 3:16-17)	
Creation	The great foundational ideal with blessing and curse
Promise	Ethics is rooted in grace , in what God first does, requiring faith
Law	Clear standards and principles of conduct, requiring obedience
Writings	Testimonies from all conditions of life, providing practical wisdom
Prophets	God’s response to disobedience —words of judgment and hope
Gospels	The definitive way we are to live, given in Jesus’ life and words and deeds
Apostle’s witness	Modeling and mentoring the ethics of the Kingdom and Jesus, in letters and personal presence
Revelation	The vision of final things that produces patient endurance when we are under pressure

By no means does this unit cover all the material that is relevant and instructive for us in the Bible. However, it reminds us that even narrative, human witness and testimony, proverbs and songs, prophetic visions and oracles and all sorts of material are given to us to make sense of the challenges that come to us in living and leading. We need to continue probing the Bible in all of its diversity to discover those fonts of wisdom that will equip us “for every good work.”

John Stott’s chapter, “Our Complex World: Is Christian Thinking Distinctive” gave us five foundations, challenging us to have a fuller grasp on what the Bible is saying. Stott then went on to develop the notion of a Christian Mind using a fourfold framework of Scripture, similar to what we provided in the Worldview: Creation, Fall, Redemption and Consummation.

Think About It

Answer Box # 5

Take some time and quickly skim through Unit 3. Write down the key things that impress you as important to learn from this unit.

Unit 4: How do we make sense of what to do in real life?

This unit moves in the direction of practical wisdom, the quality of a leader that is essential for *effective decision-making*. We argued, in agreement with Peter Kreeft, that there is no “one right decision” for all matters of life. This is especially true for the *adiaphora*—the matters of freedom that are not at the heart of ethics. They are matters of personal taste, cultural preference and social convention.

In addition, we looked at the various components that are involved in discerning the right thing for us to do in given situations and relationships. Once we have clear standards and principles in hand, how do we manage to apply them in the midst of all our opportunities and challenges? How do we act with integrity, in line with true and important ethical standards? We argued that this involves discernment, a well-trained conscience and the habit known classically as prudence (practical wisdom). Those who are overly cautious do not show prudence but indecisiveness. Those who decide matters too quickly show impulsiveness. Prudence makes and carries out decisions in a wise and mature matter. Prudence is a character trait that develops over time with experience and learning. These three things, operating over time can lead to sharpened intuition in which we recognize “in a flash” what needs to be done.

We ended the unit with the following series of questions to help the process of judging matters of real life:

1. Have I taken time to listen sensitively and look carefully in my situation?
2. Have I interpreted the “question” the situation is asking before “answering” it?
3. Have I considered whether the words and actions I am going to undertake are appropriate to the setting?
4. Have I used my imagination to penetrate the feelings of people and the possibilities of the setting?
5. If I say or do what I am thinking of doing, is it consistent with my commitments and best character and congruent with my roles?
6. Am I willing to let people I care about know what I am doing or saying?
7. Am I willing to accept the consequences of my conduct?

The readings in John Stott, “Celebrating Ethnic Diversity” and “Simplicity, Generosity and Contentment,” both deal with responses Christians make to ethnic/racial diversity and to affluence and poverty. We live with these choices daily, even if our context is not the same as the British. What sorts of relationships and attitudes do we allow ourselves in relation to people very different than we are? What about the choices we make in using our resources to improve our own lot versus improving the lot of the poor? These are matters for deep practical wisdom as we seek to live faithfully and well.

Think About It

Answer Box # 6

Take some time and quickly skim through Unit 4. Write down the key things that impress you as important to learn from this unit.

Unit 5: How do we make ethical decisions?

In this unit we laid the foundations for *thinking* ethically. How do we frame a situation or relationship in which we find ourselves and make sense of it from an ethical point of view? The complexity and diversity of the worlds in which we live sometimes seem to render the standards and guidance of Scripture irrelevant. We find ourselves facing ethical dilemmas in which we are unsure of the right thing to do, or we face novel situations to which we have very little direct Scriptural guidance.

First we built a bridge to a world that stands outside the Church and faith in Jesus Christ. Oftentimes we must think and live ethically in the midst of people who do not share our commitment to or understanding of the Bible and its authority. How do we go about joining hands and hearts in finding common ethical ground? The model we used was the Equal Consideration of Interest, a widespread approach that builds on the Golden Rule of Christian faith as well as similar rules found in many of the religions of the world. ECI's principle is this: **“You should make judgments and decisions and act in ways that treat the interests and well-being of others as no less important than your own.”**

As a principle it is not enough on its own. It is often supplemented by “common values” that are widely recognized across cultural and religious boundaries. In addition, it is often also used with “common rights” that define more particularly how individuals working within an organization are to be treated. To be sure, these are threshold or minimal standards. They do not go as far as Christian values might go, but they are within the circle of those things Paul tells us to affirm in our culture—“whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” (Philippians 4:8) In a given cultural context one might add to, emphasize some more than others or even interpret the meaning of these values and rights somewhat differently. However, as a whole they are a good starting point for organizational ethical codes of conduct.

Common Values:	Common Rights
A. <i>Honesty: Do not deceive people</i>	A. <i>To Know</i>
B. <i>Benevolence: Do no Harm</i>	B. <i>To Free Expression</i>
C. <i>Fidelity: Fulfill your commitments and act faithfully</i>	C. <i>To Due Process</i>
D. <i>Autonomy: Enable others to act in informed, considered ways</i>	D. <i>To Safety</i>
E. <i>Lawfulness: Obey the laws and regulations</i>	E. <i>To Privacy</i>
F. <i>Confidentiality: Release information only to certain circles of people</i>	

In addition, this unit developed the RESOLVEDD method for analysis of ethical issues. This involves carefully thinking through situations that are complex and often difficult. The RESOLVEDD method is intended to help leaders resolve ethical dilemmas and complexities by taking the following steps:

1. **R**eview the history, background and details of the situation/case, seeking a clear understanding of what is going on.
2. Identify **E**thical problems or dilemmas that are involved that present themselves in this case or situation.
3. Identify the major possible **S**olutions to the ethical dilemma or choices inherent in the situation.
4. Identify the likely results, impacts, consequences or **O**utcomes for each possible choice or decision/
5. Identify the **L**ikely impact of each solution on people's lives.
6. Identify what **V**alues are upheld or violated by following each of the possible choices or decisions. (These may be cultural, rational, or scriptural—or all three). Here is where the principles drawn from Scripture or rooted in the great commandment of love are applicable.
7. **E**valuate each main solution, its consequences and how it relates to the principles of Scripture and the values at stake. Compare the possible solutions and weigh them.
8. **D**ecide which solution is the best: state it, clarify its details, and justify it.
9. **D**efend the decision against the major objections that can be raised about its main weaknesses.

In this unit we read John Stott's Chapter 3 is titled: “Our Plural World: Is Christian Witness Influential?” He helps us come to terms with the pluralism in our world, with the reality that we Christians stand as witnesses in the midst of a larger world that does not share our commitment to Christ. How do we do that winsomely and persuasively? He provides more foundations for why models like the Equal Consideration of Interest are important in building bridges where we can participate constructively in the ethical challenges of our day and at the same time hold fast to the faith and testimony we have in Christ.

Think About It

Answer Box # 7

Take some time and quickly skim through Unit 5. Write down the key things that impress you as important to learn from this unit.

C. Ethical Reasoning

Unit 6: Where do we find dependable ethical foundations?

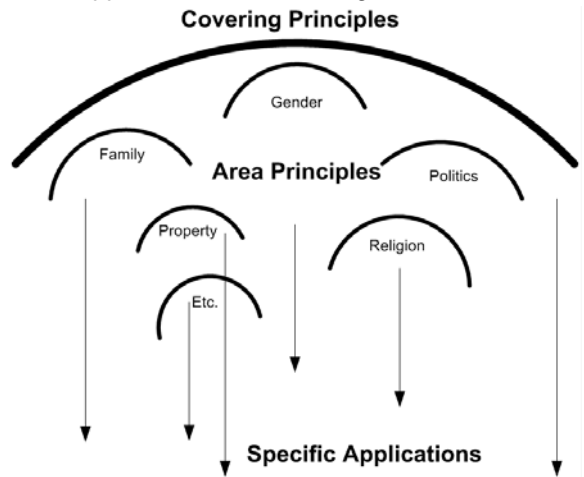
In this unit we underlined the reality that both Jesus and Paul used Scripture as their basic foundation for developing and affirming ethical standards and principles. For them this meant the Old Testament. We dare not neglect the Old Testament when we seek to do Christian ethics. For both of them the “Torah”—the law—was an important source of ethical thinking.

For this reason we considered in more detail the nature and importance of the “Ten Words” (Ten Commandments), for a number of modern interpretations and practices have diminished their importance. However, a careful understanding of them shows how relevant and important they are. They help us please God, shape our expression of love and justice and offer insight into the state of our hearts.

The Ten Commandments, as is the case with all standards and principles, come at different levels of generality and applicability. Some are “covering” principles that cover all arenas of life (such as love and justice). Others are “area” principles, applicable to a given sector of life. Then there are some rules or principles that are specific applications, limited to a given situation and cultural reality. So, as we seek to clarify and apply rules or principles, we need to be clear at what level the imperative or principle we are deriving from Scripture establishes as a basis for the ethical application we are making.

In examining the first four of the Ten Commandments, we discovered that not only do we learn about our duties and responsibilities toward God, but we also have strong clues about how and why we are to treat other humans and our commitments to them and their reputations. We are imagers of God in human life, so in learning how God treats us and how we are to treat God and God’s name, we also learn things about how we are to treat one another.

John Stott’s “War and Peace” (Chapter 4) introduces us to our first major, global ethical issue. We already knew it, but it is good to be reminded that Christians, equally committed to the Bible and to Christ following, disagree on this matter. It reminds us that good, sincere Christians will disagree on ethical issues. Even with dependable ethical foundations, interpretation of those foundations will lead committed Christians to different conclusions as they try to think faithfully and clearly about issues of conduct. We should not be surprised, for even in the New Testament we see this happening—the differences between the “weak” and the “strong” (Romans 14:1-15:13; I Corinthians 8) demonstrate this. We are not to allow differences on these matters to become larger than our common allegiance to Jesus Christ and love for one another.



Think About It

Answer Box # 8

Take some time and quickly skim through Unit 6. Write down the key things that impress you as important to learn from this unit.

Unit 7: What is the central challenge of Christian ethics?

In this unit we reviewed commandments six through ten. They are more clearly focused on our relationships to one another as humans made in God's image. All six of these (as is true of three of the first four commandments) are reaffirmed in the New Testament. While they do not tell us what we must do in order to enter God's salvation, they do paint a portrait of what faithful living, energized by grace, looks like. These area principles provide a framework that is later developed by Paul and others into longer lists of things like deception and falsehoods, coveting and lusting, sexual immorality of various sorts, greediness and lack of generosity, stealing from and injuring one's neighbor, disrespect and dishonoring of parents, etc.

In the appendix we took a look at the pervasive issue of pornography and out-of-control sex. The tragedy is that the internet has become a trap for many vulnerable Christians. The free availability of pornography has lured many into a double life and disappointing enslavement to the seduction of images of sex. As leaders we must first deal with this reality in our lives and then with our colleagues.

The reading from John Stott exposes us to the critical global issues of caring for creation and living with global poverty (Chapters 5 and 6). They are increasingly connected issues as global warming has its effects. The people who are most impacted by the degradation of the environment are the poor. They have the least resources to cope with the changes in climate. The debate will continue over what is happening as the population continues to rise and global resources are depleted. Christians, as stewards (not lords) of Creation, must be part of the answer, not part of the naysayers. Our relation to the poor and our advocacy on their behalf is a measure of our spirituality, as so much of the Bible indicates. However, the issues of how to address global poverty take a lot of knowledge, technical expertise and wisdom. Given our responsibility to our neighbors, we who have many resources cannot hoard them in an age of hunger and homelessness. God calls us to a ministry of mercy and justice.

Think About It

Answer Box # 9

Take some time and quickly skim through Unit 7. Write down the key things that impress you as important to learn from this unit.

Unit 8: How do we live ethically in our relationships?

For many Christians, Jesus Christ is the center of Christian ethics. Here we find the definitive and fullest revelation of the will of God for living and leading. His life models ethical perfection (in a way that the various models we view at the end of each unit do not—whether Rebekah, Abel, Esther, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Gideon or others from the Hebrews 11 hall of fame). Jesus' words give us sharp insight into the full meaning of the Old Testament as well as the heart of God.

We used the Sermon on the Mount as exemplary of his ethical teaching though it is by no means the whole of his teaching. There we found the order of grace followed by law. First we have the Beatitudes (we are blessed by what God does for us and makes of us), and then we have the instructions and imperatives of the Sermon that will enable us to be a blessing.

We touched briefly on Paul's ethical instruction, looking at how to deal with people you don't like and with the question of celibacy (life-long, chaste singleness). Paul underscores the importance of the Holy Spirit as the enabler and one who empowers us to live in the way of Jesus.

The appendix in this unit looks at same-sex sexuality (homosexuality) and how a full ethical response is developed in the light of Scripture, science, cultural studies and pastoral wisdom. It is an example of the complexity of what seems on the surface to be a "simple" ethical issue for Christians. It reminds us as well that many of the ethical issues we face require a depth of analysis and understanding that we are not able to do with all the issues we encounter in this introduction to Christian ethics.

John Stott tackles the difficult and centrally important issues of gender (Chapter 12: "Women, Men and God"), and "Marriage, Cohabitation and Divorce" (Chapter 13). These are issues that will continue to grow in importance as the world becomes more educated and mobile. Servant leadership is the key to these areas as we struggle to provide full space for the gifts and callings of women, even to ordained ministry. In addition, many Christian communities need to reexamine their practices with regard to divorce, having made that an ethical disqualifier for men and women in ministry in ways that do not fit biblical teachings. Stott provides us with a sensitive and clear account of biblical and pastoral guidance in

thinking about women in leadership and men and women in various states of singleness, cohabitation and marriage (or divorce).

Think About It

Answer Box # 10

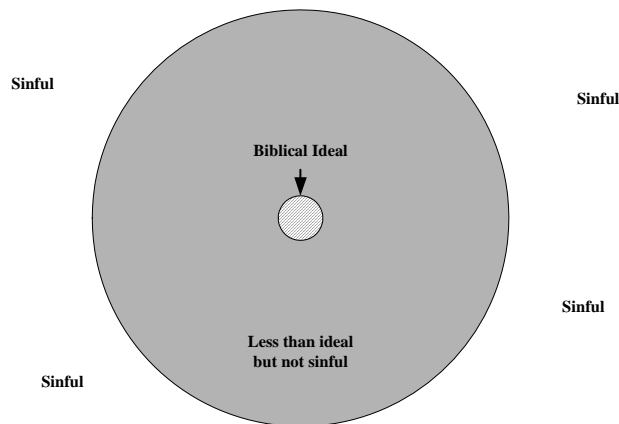
Take some time and quickly skim through Unit 7. Write down the key things that impress you as important to learn from this unit.

Unit 9: Ethics and Culture: What's the Difference?

Culture and ethics are strongly related. We know that the worldview of people is a powerful shaper of their notions of values, proper human conduct and legitimate ways of treating other people. That was one reason we started with a Christian worldview. Culture means Christians from differing cultural backgrounds will see the applications of God's standards and principles differently. We started by demonstrating that ideas about marriage and sexual practices vary significantly by cultural background. We can see that simply in the way our own sense of right and wrong in this area differs from some of the permitted patterns in the Bible (such as polygamy, levirate marriage, divorce, incest rules, bride wealth and so on). The culturally shaped applications in the Bible are different from some of the legitimate applications in our own culture and context.

To help sort cultural and ethical issues, we developed several models.

- That God “regulates” culture rather than legislates or creates a holy culture for all humans. The value God places on culture can be seen in the final composition of the New Jerusalem. There, people of every language, tribe and culture will be present. Into that great city, the “glory and honor” of the nations will be present. (Revelation 21:26) Our cultural differences will not vanish with the final things.
- That many things are *adiaphora*—matters of freedom that are not at the heart of the matter but can be engaged as cultural preferences, not ethical or moral considerations.
- That there are in Scripture trans-cultural “ideals” that norm human conduct and cultural institutions. Using the “tether” model we suggested that there are three ethical categories to use in sorting moral matters—ideal, less-than-ideal but not sinful and sinful.
- That God's work with us is a “starting point plus process” method. God starts with us even when we are far from the ideal, and over time, through a process of sanctification, God moves us and our cultures closer to God's ideals.



Based on Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, p. 398

Our life is to be governed by the “pilgrim” and “missionary” principles. We are pilgrims in all our cultures. No one culture is the Kingdom of God. Our primary citizenship is in heaven, so we cannot sacralize our cultural preferences but at times must challenge them. We also are missionaries to our cultures (or to the culture God calls us), so we can take up its patterns and contextualize ourselves and the Gospel in ways that incarnate Christian faith in that given culture. Culture is not an excuse for sin, but no single culture is the measure of what is less than ideal but not sinful. That is determined only by the Spirit in dialogue with Scripture and the larger Christian tradition by Christians in a given culture.

In this unit we read Stott's chapters 15 (Biotechnology) and 16 (Same-sex relationships). Science continues to push the boundaries of what we understand and what we can do. Questions about humans designing genes and inserting them into the food chain and into choices we make as humans raise significant new issues. Genetics also increasingly shows us ways in which our behavior and bodily

processes are embedded in the genes we inherited from the past. Some of this bears even on same-sex relationships. Christians have said over the years that genes are not destiny. Just because something is “natural” does not make it “ethical.” Those with genes that heighten the tendency toward violence claim that their out-of-control sexuality is genetic or that there may be a genetic component to same-sex impulses. However, it does not excuse nor legitimate rape or battery. To do so commits the “naturalistic” fallacy. Ethics tells us that we must resist certain “natural” tendencies that are present due to the fall, and, by God’s grace, learn to be non-violent chaste or faithful humans, displaying the image of God in our character and conduct.

Think About It

Answer Box # 11

Take some time and quickly skim through Unit 8. Write down the key things that impress you as important to learn from this unit.

D. Organizations and Ethical Decision Making

Unit 10: What is involved in the ethics of organizations?

This is our last full unit and climaxes our course with a look at organizational ethics. Most of this module is focused on the leader, not on the organization being led. However, we cannot finish this topic without also taking a brief glance at how the leader infuses and enlivens an organizational culture of high ethical standards. Both in Unit 12 and here, we stress organizational codes of conduct as well as the centrality of leadership in developing an organizational culture or climate where the core values are deeply embedded throughout and a set of organizational practices that are principle-guided and ethically sound.

While organizations often just manage for compliance or use ethical codes to manage stakeholder relationships, we advocate developing a value-based organization. Ethical fitness for organizations is marked by a number of traits as David Gill’s list suggests.

David W. Gill’s Ten Traits of Ethically Healthy Organizations

1. **Loyalty.** *Tenaciously preserve core mission and vision; hang in there with the team; no traitors.*
2. **Openness & Humility.** *Teachability from top to bottom of organization; no arrogant know-it-alls.*
3. **Accountability & Responsibility.** *All individuals and teams stand up; no blaming, no excuses.*
4. **Freedom.** *Creative risk-taking encouraged; no micro-managing control freaks.*
5. **Ethics and Excellence.** *Insatiable hunger for both “doing the right thing” and “doing things right.”*
6. **Mistake Tolerance.** *Learn and try again; avoid punitive, fearful, repressive reactions.*
7. **Honesty, Integrity, and Transparency.** *Consistency of thought, talk, and walk; no hidden agendas or evasions.*
8. **Collaboration and Integration.** *Bringing people together; bringing ideas together.*
9. **Courage and Persistence.** *Guts in the face of difficulty.*
10. **Joyfulness and Fun.** *Stay positive even in hard times.*

David W. Gill, *It’s About Excellence: Building Ethically Healthy Organizations*, (Executive Excellence Publishing, 2008), 185.

We also looked at some typical sorts of unethical conduct found in organizations as a beginning orientation to the challenges of developing ethical fitness. It takes ethical fitness both in the leader as well as in the organization. We ended with ways of dealing with ethical misconduct (and Appendix C gave an example of an organization’s procedures for reporting and addressing ethical misconduct)

Think About It

Answer Box # 12

Take some time and quickly skim through Unit 10. Write down the key things that impress you as important to learn from this unit.

The reading in John Stott came from Chapters 8 and 9, “The World of Work” and “Business Relationships.” Stott helped us explore the meaning of work (which consumes much of our lives) as well as some of the typical issues that arise in business.

This brings us to the end of our review. This module only introduces you to a much larger topic. We have not been able to explore a number of important areas, but this should give you a good launching place from which to work on your own ethical fitness and the fitness of the organization you serve. Appendix A to this unit provides you with a beginning list of the sorts of ethical issues and questions Christians are facing in many contexts. You likely could add a number of additional issues to it.

You will find in Unit 13 (not assigned in this course) a number of additional resources for applied ethics. This includes guidelines for writing codes of conduct, examples of codes of conduct written for a number of different arenas of work and profession, an example of a Christian ethical statement from Nigeria, a number of ethical cases not presented in this module and some suggested websites (available as of 2010).

Models: Samuel

Read: I Samuel 15-16; Hebrews 11:32

Samuel is the story of a lotus blossom growing out of a swamp. Remember the story?

His origins were in a polygamous family rife with jealousy and favoritism. (I Samuel 1:2, 4-8) His childhood was spent in the household of a corrupt priest. (I Samuel 2:11-26)

Yet, the word of the Lord came to Samuel. (I Samuel 3:10-14, 19-21) He was God’s chosen one to bring the word of the Lord to Israel at the time it was going to transition from regional judges to a unifying King. He was called upon to be a prophet as well as to judge Israel. His role was not only to preside over the origins of monarchy in Israel, but, as Hebrews 11:32 put it, “to administer justice.” (I Samuel 7:15-17) When he grew old and appointed his sons as judges too, they were corrupt and perverted justice. (I Samuel 18:1-5) Therefore, the people wanted a king to lead them. Samuel was the one who anointed Saul to be that first king, and Samuel later anointed David.

However, Saul was more committed to his own kingship than the Kingship of the Lord in Israel. He loved being the one who would really deliver Israel from all the raids and ruin caused by the neighboring peoples. He loved the recognition for his leadership. When he came back from one of his successful campaigns against the Amalekites, he sets up a monument to himself and his success. (I Samuel 15:12)

Saul tried to substitute being religious for being obedient to God. Saul was given every advantage and opportunity to be king in God’s Kingdom—anoointed by Samuel, filled with the Spirit, guided by Samuel’s words, supported by thousands in Israel who recognized Saul’s kingship, given direct instructions by God to destroy the enemies of Israel and free it from trouble. What more could you ask for an identity and a purpose in life? Saul had it all—everything but obedience to the word of the Lord.

God rejected him in favor of a young sapling of a man, the shepherd David. Gradually Saul lost contact with the presence of God until he became God-forsaken. So low did he fall that we read the most fearsome and tragic words that can be blazoned across the life of one of God’s people. “Now the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him.” (I Samuel 16:14) God let Saul reap what he had sown—not something different from what he had sown—but precisely what he had sown.

When Samuel received the word from God that Saul was rejected, he was initially angry (I Samuel 15:11), so angry he stayed up all night to argue with God. Then he felt grief for many days. God finally said to Samuel, “How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over

Israel.” (1 Samuel 16:1) Samuel had a deep investment in Saul and Saul’s success. When Saul failed, Samuel felt the failure deeply.

When he was told to anoint another as King of Israel, he was deeply fearful of Saul. “How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me.” (1 Samuel 16:2) Samuel was more aware of Saul’s character than his grief and anger could acknowledge. His fear told him he knew Saul was not of good character. We know the rest of the story. Saul becomes an angry, paranoid, stay-in-power-at-all cost tyrant. He is so centered on his own power and prestige that he cannot see David as one of his best allies in the fight against the neighboring aggressors. Again and again he seeks David’s death. When he realizes his eldest son and heir Jonathan is aiding David, he hurls a spear to kill him.

What do we do as leaders when we have acted in line with the clear guidance of God in laying hands on a young leader and that leader becomes the opposite of what we had hoped? What happens when we must then communicate the rejection of that leadership and affirm its successor? And do it where our very well-being may be at stake and in the hands of the rejected, first leader? Samuel was realistic in his fear of Saul. He was self-indulgent and in denial in his anger and grief over Saul.

- **His ethical challenge:** To acknowledge the failure of the leader he had anointed to be the first king.
- **His ethical action:** To anoint a second successor to his leadership.
- **His temptation:** To stick with his first anointed successor.
- **The cost of his doing what was right:** The fear that his first choice of king would kill him if Saul heard Samuel had anointed another.
- **The reward of his doing what was right:** The inauguration of the greatest king of Israel’s history.

Unit 11 Final Assignment

Final Assignment

1. On one to two pages list the ten most significant ethical issues you have learned as you have worked through the material in this course.
2. Please confirm that you have discussed the results of your interactive work in Unit 11 (“Think About It” boxes) with a group of two other people.
3. Given all you have read in this unit (including Stott, pp. 189-240 Human Rights; 389-417 Abortion and Euthanasia), what practical initiatives do you think are possible for us to take in areas of human rights? As leaders, is our commitment to human rights an indication of our moral competency? Why or why not?

When your work is complete (three to five pages total), send a copy to your facilitator via email as an attachment. Please send it by the date indicated in the Module Calendar.

Final Project:

The culminating assignment for this Course is a RESOLVEDD analysis of a Case Study which will be sent to you by your facilitator. Please observe the instructions and deadline included in that assignment. This will give you good practice for the final exam, for there will be some short and long case studies to analyze in that exam.

Appendix A: *Living the truth: Choosing priority moral questions*

The moral issues that have been addressed do not represent an attempt to be either systematic or comprehensive. In every case we have tried to select issues that Jesus or the biblical writers address fairly directly. We have also tried to illustrate an approach to applied Christian ethics that, having identified an issue, (1) seeks biblical teaching or examples that shed light on the issue, (2) asks questions that require the readers to think critically about the shape and impact of the issue in their own social context and personal life and finally, (3) encourages prayerful, thoughtful decisions that will lead to concrete action. It is not possible for the authors to know all the various ways in which moral questions present themselves in the great diversity of African cultures or in any other human cultures. It is for this reason that this course is only a guide and that the really important work, if it is done, will be done by you who are determined to strive for greater Christ-likeness in your lives, churches and communities.

With this in mind we would like to identify some more detailed ethical questions that may be important to you (some issues will not be relevant to your situation) and to encourage you to search for light from the Scriptures on questions that are important to you. The following list is not exhaustive and will need to be supplemented by the other questions that followers of Jesus and Christian churches believe need to be addressed in their particular contexts. Furthermore, the following issues do not reflect the way in which Africans or Asians or Latin Americans would think about these questions. Their main value is to help you to think about important areas that need ethical reflection, discussion and decision making. Then you can look at them through the lens of your particular society. In this way you can formulate moral problems and questions in ways that truly address the realities of your particular context.

In viewing the list of issues that follow, it could be useful for you to underline for future reference those issues that seem important and need urgent attention in your opinion.

Human sexuality:

- Distinctions between the sexes (innate and roles), inequality or equality of the sexes

Marriage and sexuality:

- Purposes of marriage: wholeness, companionship, procreation, wholeness for singles
- Issues facing marriage: marriage to an unbeliever, interdenominational marriages, selfishness as root cause of disunity, adultery, artificial insemination, interracial/intercaste marriages, polygamy, divorce, remarriage, birth control, children (childlessness), arranged marriages, wife-beating, spousal abuse, dowry payment
- Non-marital issues facing God's purposes for sexuality: lust, immodesty, masturbation, pornography, sex before marriage, homosexuality, sex trafficking, prostitution
- Issues in raising children: discipline (forms and purpose), values, sexual abuse of children, child labor, female genital mutilation (female circumcision)

Responsibilities in the Christian home:

- Roles in marriage: interpretation and application of Galatians 3:28
- Responsibilities and rights of the husband and the wife
- Responsibilities of the parents
- Responsibilities of the extended family
- Responsibilities of children

Life issues:

- Forms of killing: murder, self-defense, work-related toxic poisoning, violence, neglect, anger, unsafe products
- Racism/Caste Pride: biblical view of discrimination, causes of racism/caste pride, racism/caste in the Church
- Abortion and infanticide: beginning of life, value of life, the right to choose, personhood, biological evidence, biblical evidence, abortion as murder, abortion to save the life of the mother, acephalic fetuses, genetic anomalies
 - o Specific situations: mental health of the mother, life of the mother, unwanted children, rape, incest, the handicapped
- Suicide: suicide as sin, self-sacrifice, refusing medical care
- Euthanasia: active and passive, responsibility for the decision
- War: nonresistance, theory of the just war, a theology of peace, nuclear war, liberation movements, terrorism
- Crime and punishment:
 - o Cause and nature of crime
 - o Purpose of punishment: rehabilitation, deterrence, protection of the innocent, punitive

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- Varieties of punishment: alternatives to imprisonment, capital punishment
- Christian responsibility for criminal justice
- Ethics in biomedical issues

Integrity: Property and truth

- Labor and management: responsibilities of both labor and management, responsibilities of management, responsibilities of labor, collective bargaining
- Work and leisure: the "Protestant work ethic," leisure
- Economic systems: capitalism vs. socialism, profits and interest in capitalism, the global economy, international bodies (IMF, World Bank etc.), multinational corporations and their roles
- Personal integrity: bankruptcy, litigation, poverty and wealth, simple lifestyle

Social responsibility:

- Church: care for its own, care for others, addressing the government, using money and getting money
- Corporate integrity: ways to lose it, the multinationals, automation, stewardship of Creation, fair wages, provision of safe products and safe working environment, staff development, truth in advertising
- Poverty, famine, population explosion
- Healthcare: access to basic medical care for all
- Ecology, global warming, environmental stewardship
- Gambling: social effects of gambling
- Non-property robbery: idea theft, time and culture theft, identity theft
- Corruption: private and public

Truth and deception:

- Perjury and lying, the nature of deception, varieties of deception (lying without words, lying with true words, pretense and exaggeration, culture and lying, motivation of self-interest, hypocrisy, self-deception)
- Exceptions: incomplete truth, the lesser of two evils, inconsequential social arrangements, deception in war, deception in opposing criminals

Christians and Society: Church and State:

- Contemporary views: state controls church, church dominates state, church and state assigned mutually exclusive roles, church and state distinct but mutually influential
- The role of the Church: its spiritual role, prophetic ministry to society, involvement in justice issues, stance toward politics, relationship with para-Church/NGOs
- The role of the individual Christian: order of priorities in social responsibilities, responsibility toward society, engagement with political parties and issues
- The role of government:
 - Purposes of government: restraining evil, promoting human welfare, providing freedom
 - Forms of government, government social action in a free society (executive branch, legislative branch, judicial branch)
- Opposition to government: submission, mandated disobedience, civil disobedience, resistance by force, nonviolent resistance
- The schools: state schools and values, private Christian schools, access to education for all children (girls and boys), adequate resources dedicate to education
- The media: television, popular music, news media, antidotes (Scripture and critical vigilance, Christian media, Christians in media, pressure)

Fallible choices: How to make ethical decisions when the will of God is not fully clear

- Ethical questions on which Christians differ
- Reasons for difference among Christians
- Response to differing opinions
- Knowing God's will in matters not revealed in Scripture:
- The case for divine guidance
- Principles for pleasing God in the choices of life: Scripture, prayer, the Church, reason, inner conviction
- Dangers to avoid: intuitionism, rationalism, magic, infallibility, trivialization, irresponsible deferring to others, privatization

Needed: A revised list of moral issues for reflection and action that grow directly out of your particular context and that are challenging Christians in your society today

- This list is from a Western text on this matter and is clearly incomplete.

Think About It

Answer Box # 13

Identify a list of moral questions that you would like to see discussed in your Christian community, by your church leaders or in your Christian organization.

Appendix B: Moral Intelligence

Doug Lennick and Fred Kiel have been developing a new area of thinking about leadership. Most leaders are aware of technical/managerial skills that are essential competencies for effective organizational leaders.

Some time ago, this was supplemented by work showing that how important “people” skills were in contributing to the success of organizational and managerial leadership. This grew out of the work of Howard Gardner and was popularized by Daniel Goleman.¹ Emotional Intelligence is the ability, capacity, skill to identify, assess, and manage the emotions of one’s self, of others and of groups. This competence has been shown to be a critical competence in leading organizational teams to higher levels of productivity and creativity.

Lennick and Kiel have argued that there is a third sort of intelligence or competency that also impacts organizational leadership. This has to do with “moral intelligence.” In their book, *Moral Intelligence: Enhancing Business Performance and Leadership Success* (Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education/Wharton School Publishing, 2007), they develop a model of basic ethical principles and the associated moral competencies that embody those principles. Their chart is as follows:

Principles	Related Moral Competencies
Integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acting consistently with principles, values and beliefs • Telling the truth • Standing up for what is right • Keeping promises
Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking responsibility for personal choices • Admitting mistake and failures • Embracing responsibility for serving others
Compassion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively caring about others
Forgiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letting go of one’s own mistakes • Letting go of others’ mistakes

Each of these four main principles is related to one or more competencies that people practice. You can tell that this does not specify (under integrity) what the principles and values are that might be espoused. For the Christian leader, those values and beliefs will come from their understanding of the will of God discerned from Scripture and applied within their own cultural context.

¹ *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* (New York: Bantam Books, 1995).
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Nonetheless, it is a useful and helpful beginning in recognizing that basic moral and ethical principles and practices are important elements in defining and evaluating the success of organizational leadership.

On the following pages, we have included their Moral Competency Inventory as a tool for your own self-assessment as to how well you embody these ten moral competencies.

MORAL COMPETENCY INVENTORY²

STATEMENTS:	1 NEVER	2 INFREQUENTLY	3 SOMETIMES	4 IN MOST SITUATIONS	5 IN ALL SITUATIONS
1. I can clearly state the principles, values and beliefs that guide my actions.					
2. I tell the truth unless there is an overriding moral reason to withhold it.					
3. I will generally confront someone if I see them doing something that isn't right.					
4. When I agree to do something, I always follow through.					
5. When I make a decision that turns out to be a mistake, I admit it.					
6. I own up to my own mistakes and failures.					
7. My colleagues would say that I go out of my way to help them.					
8. My first response when I meet new people is to be genuinely interested in them.					
9. I appreciate the positive aspects of my past mistakes, realizing that they were valuable lessons on my way to success.					
10. I am able to "forgive and forget," even when someone has made a serious mistake.					
11. When faced with an important decision, I consciously assess whether the decision I wish to make is aligned with my most deeply held principles, values and beliefs.					
12. My friends know they can depend on me to be truthful to them.					
13. If I believe that my boss is doing something that isn't right, I will challenge him or her.					
14. My friends and coworkers know they can depend on me to keep my word.					
15. When I make a mistake, I take responsibility for correcting the situation.					

² Based on Doug Lennick and Fred Kiel, *Moral Intelligence: Enhancing Business Performance and Leadership Success* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education/Wharton School Publishing, 2007), pp. 251-271

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	1 NEVER	2 INFREQUENTLY	3 SOMETIMES	4 IN MOST SITUATIONS	5 IN ALL SITUATIONS
16. I am willing to accept the consequences of my mistakes.					
17. My leadership approach is to lead by serving others.					
18. I truly care about the people I work with as people – not just as the “human capital” needed to produce results.					
19. I resist the urge to dwell on my mistakes.					
20. When I forgive someone, I find that it benefits me as much as it does them.					
21. My friends would say that my behavior is very consistent with my beliefs and values.					
22. My coworkers think of me as an honest person.					
23. If I knew my company was engaging in unethical or illegal behavior, I would report it, even if it could have an adverse effect on my career.					
24. When a situation may prevent me from keeping a promise, I consult with those involved to renegotiate the agreement.					
25. My coworkers would say that I take ownership for my decisions.					
26. I use my mistakes as an opportunity to improve my performance.					
27. I pay attention to the development needs of my coworkers.					
28. My coworkers would say that I am a compassionate person.					
29. My coworkers would say that I have a realistic attitude about my mistakes and failures.					
30. I accept that other people will make mistakes.					
31. My coworkers would say that my behavior is very consistent with my beliefs and values.					
32. I am able to deliver negative feedback in a respectful way.					
33. My coworkers would say that I am the kind of person who stands up for my convictions.					
34. When someone asks me to keep a confidence, I do so.					
35. When things go wrong, I do not blame others or circumstances.					

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	1 NEVER	2 INFREQUENTLY	3 SOMETIMES	4 IN MOST SITUATIONS	5 IN ALL SITUATIONS
36. I discuss my mistakes with coworkers to encourage tolerance for risk.					
37. I spend a significant amount of my time providing resources and/or removing obstacles for my coworkers.					
38. Because I care about my coworkers, I actively support their efforts to accomplish important personal goals.					
39. Even when I have made a serious mistake in my life, I am able to forgive myself and move ahead.					
40. Even when people make mistakes, I continue to trust them.					

Scoring the MCI:

1. Transfer your ratings for each item to the scoring sheet. Your item 1 rating should be placed next to the number “1” in column A. Your rating for item 2 should be placed next to “2” in Column B and so on. Continue until you have transferred your ratings for all 40 items.
2. Add each column and place the total in the box indicated.
3. Add columns A through J and place the total in the box indicated. Columns A through J are subscores for each of the 10 moral competencies.
4. Divide the total from columns A-J by 2 and place in the box indicated. This is your total MC (Moral Competency) score. The maximum MCI is 100.
5. Using the Moral Competencies Worksheet below the scoring sheet, transfer your score for each column—A through J—to the corresponding list of competencies that are listed after each corresponding letter.

MCI Scoring Sheet

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	
Item	Item	Item	Item	Item	Item	Item	Item	Item	Item	Add A-J
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	
31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	
Add column A	Add column B	Add column C	Add column D	Add column E	Add column F	Add column G	Add column H	Add column I	Add column J	↓
										↑
										Total MCI Score

Moral Competency Worksheet

- ___A. Acting consistently with principles, values and beliefs
- ___B. Telling the truth
- ___C. Standing up for what is right
- ___D. Keeping promises
- ___E. Taking responsibility for personal choices
- ___F. Admitting mistakes and failures
- ___G. Embracing responsibility for serving others
- ___H. Actively caring about others
- ___I. Ability to let go of one’s mistakes
- ___J. Ability to let go of other’s mistakes

Total MCI Score (Alignment Score)	
<u>Score</u>	<u>Ranking</u>
90-100	Highest
80-89	Very high
70-79	High
60-69	Moderate
40-59	Low
20-39	Very Low

When you have listed these scores, fill in the highest and lowest scoring items in the table below.

What your scores mean:

- A. **The total MCI** score is a measure of alignment. If your score is high, it is likely that you typically act in ways that are consistent with your beliefs and goals. If your score is low, it is likely that your behavior is out of sync with what you believe and what you want for yourself.
- B. There are a number of **different ways of interpreting** and looking at the MCI scores. Certainly, no test can be the final word on your actual competency. This is a tool to help trigger self-awareness of how you operate and where you might want to think more deeply about your practices. It may suggest some areas on which you need to focus in order to strengthen your performance. Of course, if something seems confusing or strange, it may be. You know yourself better than a pen and paper test can unveil. Work with the results as a means of self-examination and development.
 - The maximum score is 100, yet none of us is perfect. If you answered every item on the MCI with a “5,” it may be that you have difficulty acknowledging some areas of weakness.
 - The minimum score is 20. Most people have some level of moral competency so that a very low score may reflect a tendency toward undue self-criticism more than a genuine moral incompetence. In the past use of this inventory, scores below 60 have been rare. This may reflect that the organizational leaders taking the inventory have some strength in this area or they would not have succeeded in leadership.
 - Most scores have fallen in the moderate range of 60 and 79.

C. **Highest and lowest moral competency scores** may tell us some helpful information. Most people have one or two areas that are higher than others or lower than the bulk of them. Take a look at what you filled in this table:

- Do your highest scores fit your understanding of your own strengths? If so, these are strengths you know how to use to maintain alignment and promote high performance. Are any of them a surprise? If so they may be areas of which you have not been fully aware and can use to help achieve your goals more effectively.

Highest Moral Competencies	Lowest Moral competencies
1. _____	1. _____
2. _____	2. _____
3. _____	3. _____

- Do your lowest scores fit your understanding of your own weaknesses? If so, you have the opportunity to develop them further, if they are important to you. Are there any that surprised you? If so, they may represent blind spots that keep you from being as effective as you can in reaching your goals.

D. **Reality testing.** How much do you trust your self-assessment of your moral competencies? Most of us have some difficulty seeing ourselves as other see us. As a reality test, we recommend that you share your MCI with one or two trusted friends or colleagues. You can ask them:

- How well do my strengths represented on the MCI reflect your perception of my strengths?
- How well do my weaknesses represented on the MCI reflect your perception of my weaknesses?
- Are there other moral competencies that you see as my strengths or weaknesses?
- On a scale of 1 to 10 (with ten being very strong) how would you rate me on integrity? On responsibility? On compassion? On forgiveness?

E. Does your score matter?

All the competencies are important and are synergistic. But realistically, given who we are, our organizations and cultural context, not all of them will be impactful and important to us and our organization. On the worksheet below complete the major questions, assuming your MCI scores reflect somewhat accurately your strengths and weaknesses. This will prioritize these competencies and give you the basis to map out a straightforward approach to enhancing your moral and emotional competencies.

Assignment Worksheet

Moral Competencies	MCI Score (High, Medium, Low)	Importance to my Principles, Values and Beliefs (High, Medium, Low)	Importance to Accomplishing my Goals (High, Medium, Low)
A. Acting consistently with principles, values and, beliefs			
B. Telling the truth			
C. Standing up for what is right			
D. Keeping promises			
E. Taking responsibility for personal choices			
F. Admitting mistakes and failures			
G. Embracing responsibility for serving others			
H. Actively caring about others			
I. Ability to let go of one's own mistakes			
J. Ability to let go of others' mistakes			

Ethics for Living and Leading

Unit 12

Readings in Ethics and Worldviews



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Unit 12 – Readings in Ethics and Worldviews

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This unit is not part of the course proper. Here you will find papers that give more detail on what “ethics” and “Christian ethics” are about. In addition there are papers that explore the worldview foundations of various civilizational streams and traditions as they bear on ethical reasoning and conduct. These may be assigned by your instructor for reading in this course.

Appendix A: Key Aspects of Western Christian Ethics

The Subject Matter of Ethics

By Dr. David A. Fraser

Every disciplined effort to secure knowledge must indicate its special subject matter. It must also tell how it proposes to gain valid and important knowledge about that subject matter (that is, its methodology). Ethics has done so in a number of ways.

We may begin with the notion that the object of ethical reflection is *human conduct*, *human character* and the *consequences of conduct and character*, but we must be sure to say that we include more than the actions of specific individuals in the notion of conduct. Conduct is a term we shall use to refer not only to specific actions but also to the social and cultural arrangements and relationships that structure and are reinforced by those individual actions. We can speak of the conduct of human groups and communities. We can worry not only about the conduct of individuals but the conduct of companies, social movements, castes or classes and nations. We must also acknowledge that the ethics of individual conduct, the conduct of corporations or organizations and the structures of human society all require somewhat different approaches for ethical evaluation.

By **conduct** we also want to signal that there are some boundaries we want to observe. That a human being sneezes when the nose is irritated by pepper is, strictly speaking, not human conduct. It is a neural reflex of the body that seeks to expel something irritating to it. As sociologists might put it, sneezing is human *behavior* but not human *action*. Human action implies some agency and control on the part of the actor. By human conduct we mean activity that can be evaluated as right or wrong, good or bad, because of some choices made by the individual person(s) involved. To be sure, if you could have turned away from me and not blown all that was in your nose over me, an issue of conduct may well be involved. That brings up another boundary issue.

If human "conduct" is, strictly speaking, completely determined by forces beyond the control of the actor, then ethical evaluation moves away from the human conduct to those forces that bring about the "conduct." The person who is coerced or forced to do some activity is, to the degree of the coercion, not responsible for his or her action. Ethics is concerned with assigning responsibility for conduct and character. Sometimes that responsibility rests not on the individual alone but also on the structures and practices within which he or she is embedded.

In this area there is some significant and important overlap with the issues of jurisprudence and law. Yet, there is a great deal of human conduct that is not of concern to law that is nonetheless central to ethics. Something perfectly "legal" may be perfectly unethical. Yet, in both areas there is the concern with assessing responsibility for human conduct. There is recognition in both that a criminal or an unethical action has occurred even while excusing the actor involved from responsibility for that action if it is action coerced by external forces beyond the control of the actor. For ethics, the concern is with human conduct that involves choice, the ability to take this rather than another action.

To say ethics is also concerned with **character** is to signal that ethics deals with more than actions *per se*. Actions or conduct may be the central subject matter, but it is not action apart from the actor. The personhood of the one doing the action is equally central in importance to ethics (and some ethical schemes make it definitive, especially virtue or character ethics).

In Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas we find an ethics of virtue. Virtue has to do with settled habits or long term dispositions that enable a person repeatedly and easily to do what is right in an array of different circumstances or roles. The model or image behind virtue-ethics is frequently that of the process of acquiring some physical or athletic skill.

I play tennis. In becoming skilled at playing tennis, I must learn over time how to improve my performance. Eventually one can watch my backhand game and find an occasional excellent return. At times I can serve above 100 miles an hour and pass my opponent without his being able to return the serve. In both cases a coach would evaluate those particular actions as good or excellent. Am I a good tennis player? Not really. To be a good tennis player, I would need to be able to hit most backhands well and to deliver a high-powered first serve into the service court consistently. Becoming a good tennis player takes years of practice, practice that is shaped by learning to hit the tennis ball well. This is the sort of notion behind character or virtue ethics.

In such an ethical approach, evaluation reaches not only to whether a given instance of human conduct is right or wrong according to some standard of evaluation. It is also concerned with the larger context of that particular instance. Is the person who is enacting the particular right action a righteous or good person? Is the action we see typical of the way this person acts over time or is it only an exceptional instance of a bad person doing something good on this occasion? We may say that it is right conduct to tell the truth. However, it is one thing when a habitual liar steps "out of character" and is honest and another when the truth-teller is one who does so consistently and persistently even when it is personally

costly. Both instances are examples of ethically good conduct, but the persons doing them are not ethically equivalent persons.

We can at least say (for a beginning point) that ethics examines what people *do* in terms of what they ought to do and who people *are* in terms of who they ought to be. Ethics is about *doing* right and *becoming* a good or righteous person. Having said that we must also quickly add, ethics is also about more than just the person. That becomes apparent in the third element of this sketch.

When we talk about the ethics we mean the ethics of social structures or organizations. Ethics is also about creating a just social community. It is about organizations and communities doing right by all in their circles and becoming ethically fit organizations. We all are aware that a social world that discriminates against people on the basis of their race or ethnic background is wrong. We sense that a world where there are the enormously super-rich and huge slums of poor people is wrong, that medical care and medicine that can only be accessed on the basis of wealth is wrong, or that organizations that cut costs by putting their workers or customers at risk of their health and lives is wrong. Ethics is more than a matter of individual conduct and character. It is also about politics, economics, social structures, organizational decisions, legal arrangements, etc. This brings us to our third matter.

Ethics is also concerned with **consequences**. What I do has effects in my world. My conduct has outcomes that can also be ethically evaluated. Not telling the truth in court may lead to an innocent person being incarcerated for many long years. Not telling the truth about skipping my math class may have very little effect except on me. Not all sins are equal in their consequences. This is also true when doing “the right thing.” Telling the truth may mean that I get fired from my job as a research scientist at a tobacco company. Telling the truth may mean the refugees I am hiding from a tyrannical government may be killed along with me and my family.

Ethics also thinks about consequences that come from the accumulated traditions and practices of human conduct: social structures and cultural ideals of life. The way we organize ourselves into social classes, castes, status groups, circles of privilege or poverty—all of these are consequences of conduct and hold significant ethical weight. Ethics is about *forging* right practices and *becoming* a good and righteous or just community. Ethics moves at both the individual and social levels.

We must also recognize that who a person is also can affect consequences. This refers not only to character but also to position. It is one thing for a small time pastoralist to commit adultery and hide it (Judah) and another for King David to commit adultery and arrange the death of the husband (2 Samuel 11-12; see following chapters for the results). Because of his position in Israel and his anointing by God as leader of the people of God, David’s sin ramified throughout Israel and the monarchy. The more public, prominent and powerful the individual, the greater the effects of both righteous and unrighteous conduct. Leaders are held especially responsible for their conduct because of the consequences of their conduct. Their character should be so well-formed that the particular temptations of a position of power and prominence will not become the trap that causes their downfall. What they model is seen by the many.

The consequences of conduct are considered by some ethical schemes to be the central defining criteria of evaluation. A particular decision or activity is considered right or wrong as a function of whether it leads to consequences that are desirable (valued) or undesirable. This approach says the reasons some rules are considered fundamental rules of conduct is because humans have discovered that they consistently lead to good consequences. What makes them rules of good behavior is that they create the conditions good for human beings—they lead to good consequences. When following them does not lead to such consequences, we need to “break the rules.”

To be sure, we are not always in control of all the results of our conduct. We may not be able to foresee all the outcomes of a particular decision or path of action. The world in which we live is very complex and changing, and we are fallible and limited creatures. Nevertheless, we can foresee and even control some of the results of our action. To the degree that we should have had foresight and could have controlled the effects of our action, to that extent we are responsible for them and ethically liable.

Therefore, we can also say that ethics examines what people do in terms of the consequences of their responsible actions.

In very general terms we can say that ethical schemes have to come to terms with conduct and its consequences as well as the character of the human actors. Various thinkers have related these three matters in very different ways.

Those stressing action or conduct are normally labeled **deontological** (rule-based) ethicists. Deontological comes from a Greek term (*deon*) that has the idea of something necessary, something one ought to do.¹ It is what is binding in a given setting because it is customary or one’s duty. In this case the ethical or moral is said to be doing one’s duty, carrying out action according to some rule or principle

¹ Δεῖν (*dei*) denotes compulsion of any kind (the compulsion of unavoidable fate, of duty or custom, of an inner necessity or even what is fitting in a given setting).

given who one is or what position one plays in a social group. That duty is normally stated in a written or unwritten expectation (a rule, law, principle or norm).

Deontological ethics says conduct is right (or wrong) when it conforms to (or departs from) a rule or principle that expresses a given moral obligation. That duty may be thought of as a law of nature, the command of God, or some structuring element of a role relationship within a social group. The tendency of rule-based ethics has been to minimize (if not deny) the importance of motive for which the action is done or the consequences that issue from the action. Action is good when it fulfills a person's duty.

Those stressing consequences are labeled **teleological** or **consequentialist** (ends-based) ethicists. Teleological comes from a Greek term (*telos*) meaning end, purpose or goal. The moral thing to do or be is that which leads to some good or some value. The beginning question is what is the highest good in life? What is it we want out of life? Things ought to be done or avoided depending upon whether they lead to the goal of life, to what makes up happiness and fullness of life.

Utilitarianism is one form of a teleological ethic. It says the right decision and conduct is that which will produce the greatest good for the greatest number of people. In this case the actor is concerned with clarifying the values and goods that make up the good life for human beings. Action is then undertaken in terms of what will maximize the most important values and produce the most significant goods for people. Under this scheme truth telling is not an absolute value because sometimes a noble lie will preserve more values and produce better good than the bald truth (e.g., lying to the Nazis to preserve the life of Jews I am hiding).

Those stressing character espouse an ethic of **virtue** which is sometimes called **perfectionism** or **intentionalism**. Moral action is correct or right only when it is done from the correct intention, motive or inner disposition. It is not enough that my action conform to the norm of truthfulness or kindness and/or that its consequences be beneficial. I must intend to do what is good and do it out of a settled character that consistently and persistently acts in this way. In a sense, the goal of ethically correct action is to produce ethically mature people who are able easily and with pleasure to do the good repeatedly across a variety of different relationships and situations. We have "good" action when we have action coming out of a character that has been shaped and transformed so that we speak of a person as *being* good, not just *doing* good. In the final and fullest analysis, doing the good is possible only by one who has become good.

These are not the only options, but they are the main ones in terms of the ethical schemes that have appeared in the West. We will encounter some of the other major alternatives as we move forward in examining the nature of Christian ethics.

What Is Distinctive in *Christian Ethics*?

Christian ethics works with the same subject matter and the same object of study as does ethics in general—that is, human conduct and character with its consequences—but it does so from a different perspective and set of intellectual commitments. That is because the worldview framework that informs Christian thinking (regardless of one's place in history or cultural tradition) comes from an encounter with Jesus Christ as God's revelation of righteousness, grace and truth. Christian ethics is not in search of what is good and right but in the process of unfolding the implications of the good and the right revealed in Jesus Christ. Its distinctive is that it sees the conduct of humans and their social arrangements and practices as subject to the righteous judgment of God. It is the God of the Bible who determines what is good and right for the humans God created and redeemed. This has a number of powerful implications, only four of which will be spelled out here.

1. We cannot begin with the assumption that Christian ethics is simply a specialized form of a more general thing called ethics, a sort of qualification that conditions what is more generally true. Two pictures can capture this assumption. Think of a large, concrete foundation for a building. That foundation is the general knowledge of ethics while the superstructure built on it may be a Christian place of worship or a Muslim mosque or a secular gambling hall or sports arena. The foundation is the same, only the superstructure differs. What you build is simply a matter of a different architecture according to a group's purposes and taste. Or alternatively, think of a marvelous fruit drink made up of mango, papaya and grape juices. There's the base drink. Then you flavor it according to your preference with spices, with rum or with some sparkling wine. General ethics is the base fruit that makes up all the drinks, whereas the flavoring and spicing is again a matter of taste.

The assumption here is that there is a generalized ethics, true for all and everywhere, and that the more particular traditions are best understood as variations on the themes of that general ethics. We may have Hindu or Buddhist ethics, Confucian ethics, secular utilitarian ethics, Protestant ethics, Catholic

ethics and so on—but central to all of these various ethics is a more basic, more general, more central *human* ethics. Onto this truly universal, general ethic these particular ethics add their own perspective.

However, this is not an obvious assumption. It is not obvious to those who have spent time describing and probing the various cultures humans have created. Notions of good and evil are extraordinarily diverse and rooted in very different worldviews. If there is a general ethics shared by or discernible in all traditions, it is as difficult to identify as a common or general religion underlying all the religions. I don't mean to say that Christian ethics has nothing in common with other ethical traditions, only that what is common is not some general human ethics. I am saying that Christian ethics is already grounded in what is truly universal, the Creator's own revelation of what is good for the life he created for all human beings.

To be sure, classical Roman Catholic ethics has built its reasoning in this manner. For Thomas Aquinas, general revelation in nature teaches all reasonable people basic truths of right and wrong. There is a "natural" law that provides the foundation onto which the "supernatural" revelation is built. This is a very powerful and long-term ethical tradition within Christian thinking. C.S. Lewis appeals to it in his famous book, *Mere Christianity*. It has not only been Roman Catholics who find this way of thinking congenial.

This Christian approach is based on an understanding of the fall as less than complete, marring us morally but not as deeply in our rational self. We are able as rational creatures to build a general ethics with its principles (and we see such principles in pagan philosophy and non-Christian traditions). This general knowledge of ethics is then corrected and perfected by a Christian ethic.

Nevertheless, the notion of a general ethics or knowledge of the good is not obvious to the theological or biblical tradition that makes up the understanding of Christian faith by other Christian traditions. For example, the beginning of the human story in the Bible is about the taking of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The question of good and evil stands at the roots of the human race. In taking that fruit in rebellion against the limiting command and permission of God, humans were plunged into sin and corruption.

What is most true of our condition seems not to be our bright ethical awareness or our clear-sighted knowledge and performance of what is good over against what is evil. What seems most obvious is our ethical confusion and chaos, our ability to corrupt what appears to us to be the most beneficial and valuable aspects of our common life together.

Listen to Paul's diagnosis and description of the actual condition in which we find ourselves.

What then? Are we any better off? No, not at all; for we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin, as it is written: "There is no one who is righteous, not even one; there is no one who has understanding, there is no one who seeks God. All have turned aside, together they have become worthless; there is no one who shows kindness, there is not even one. Their throats are opened graves; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of vipers is under their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery are in their paths, and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes." (Romans 3:9-19)

Paul's diagnosis is that our understanding and knowledge of what is good is deficient. None of us authentically seek God, nor do we conduct ourselves in a way that shows that we conform to the character of God. We suppress the truth *in unrighteousness*.

We cannot begin with the assumption that what we find in general human reflection about the good, the right and the happy is a solid *foundation* on which to build a Christian superstructure. The foundations themselves may need radical renovation. We need the revelation God gives to correct and reshape our own human notions of the good and the right. To be sure, we may find much to commend in pagan and non-Christian ethics, but we know that *only because we have a prior knowledge in revelation* of what conforms to the ethical ideals of God for human life. Only there do we have a solid foundation upon which to build.

2. Jesus Christ is the definitive revelation of authentic human conduct and character as intended by God. *Christian* ethics is first and foremost the ethics that derive from an understanding centered in the Messiah, Jesus the Christ. Christ is what makes anything *Christian* that claims the name Christian. Christ is the great test of the so-called Christian tradition, even Christian ethics. Anything we find that claims the name of Christian must finally find its authorization in the reality that it reflects the intention and will of Jesus Christ.

To put this even more starkly (though in an unbalanced fashion), the human conduct, character and consequences that serve as the heart of ethical reflection for Christian ethics is that of the One True Human. Jesus Christ is the subject matter of *Christian* ethics. He is the only one whose character, conduct and consequences are without blemish. He is the perfect image of the perfectly ethical.

Having said that, we then must hasten to say more. This One who is the center of Christian ethics does not stand apart from his body, the Church or from the people and witness of the Old Testament. He was the Messianic figure of Israel. The Hebrew Scriptures were his Bible. The stories and instruction of the Old Testament served to inform his identity and norm his practice. To identify Jesus Christ as the center of Christian ethics is to define a circle whose circumference includes all the Scriptures as relevant and foundational, both Old and New Testaments.

In addition, this One who defines the center of Christian ethics stands as the Lord of all Creation and the Master of its history and cultures. The circle whose center is the Lord Jesus is a circle encompassing world history and the whole of Creation. We cannot suppose that what we discover in Creation and history in general, or in particular cultural traditions, is irrelevant to the task of *Christian* ethics. That Jesus Christ is definitive of authentic humanity is not exclusionary. It is inclusionary. There is no human, ethical dimension or reality that cannot be illuminated by the Light of the World. There is no ethical subject or reflection that cannot be evaluated and corrected by being placed within the circle whose center is the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. Neither the ethicist nor the theologian or any other teacher can give the decisive answer to the decisive question, “What must I do?” Christian ethics is not a substitute for the Holy Spirit’s work in commanding and guiding Christian experience. The decisive answer to the existential question facing each human being is given by Jesus Christ himself.

The strength of Protestant thought resides in its stress on the Word of God. God speaks. That notion needs to be rediscovered in every generation. God is not silent but continues in a variety of ways by the Spirit to converse with and command human life. Ethics and ethical systems must be evaluated on the basis of the degree to which they enable the hearing of the living Word of God. When they become cumbersome traditions that operate as legalistic fences, confining not only Christian practice but the ability to hear God speak, they serve the same role as the serpent in the Garden of Eden.

Nonetheless, Protestants have always stressed the reality that God speaks through Scripture *and* other means. To listen for the voice of God means first to listen to that voice *in Scripture*. The instruction of the stories, psalms, proverbs, laws, prophetic utterances and letters are the conduit of divine discourse. To recognize the voice of God elsewhere in Creation or other traditions is to hear a voice that speaks with the accents we find already in Scripture. Our beginning point is not our ending point.

Unfortunately, there is a modern pluralism and relativism that has infiltrated even Christian communities. It has denigrated and slandered Scripture. Rather than delighting in the written Word of God, we find so-called Christian ethical reflection warning us against its perspective and advocacy. New forms of Marcionism² are rampant, writing off as impossible, or even evil, large segments of the Bible. *Christian* ethics is always held accountable by Jesus Christ whose common practice was rooted in the authority of the Hebrew Scriptures. While we find Jesus going beyond the Old Testament, he never went *against* it.

One of the key issues for Christian ethics resides in how Scripture is to be used in ethical reflection. The Scripture is authoritative insofar as it is properly interpreted. The task of hearing the voice of God, while intensely personal, is not individualistic. We must listen to the Scriptures along with the saints of all the ages and cultures in a reverent and obedient posture. We cannot, as some are doing, attempt to create a sort of new, modern Christian faith that ignores or denigrates what the Christian faith has been in all places and everywhere.

4. Good works and astounding virtues do not add up to the holiness that God requires from human conduct and character. We can never forget that Christian ethics is not in the business of bringing about human righteousness. The power to do the good comes not simply from the clarity or comprehensiveness of ethical understanding. Accomplishing all the highest ideals of human civilization, embodying the highest of virtues, acting from the most honest of intentions and sincerest of religious motives cannot in themselves make a single individual right with God. Christian ethics is grace-filled and Spirit-empowered, or it is no longer *Christian* ethics.

To be sure, the “righteous pagan” is a blessing to Creation and human society. The Scriptures talk about such people:

When Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their

² Marcion was an early Church figure who argued that the Old Testament god was a god of wrath and not worthy of Christians. So, he dismissed the Old Testament as part of the Scriptures of Christians. So too, Marcion argued, are some of what we now have in the New Testament. His canon was only the gospel (of Marcion) and ten of Paul’s letters. His gospel parallels that of Luke, though edited to conform to his ideas that Jesus and Yahweh are two different beings, with Jesus the superior. He cut much of the Bible out of his “legitimate” Scriptures to fit his own ideas.

consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them. (Rom 2:14-15)

These are responding to the light of God in Creation and conscience and, without the special revelation of God, are responding to what is right and good. We are grateful that there are people like this in all cultures and contexts. However, this alone does not justify them before God. Even they face the Judge of all the earth, but we do not denigrate the good they do or deny that they do what is right.

Jesus Christ is the way to God. He is the truth about who we are and what we need to do. He alone provides the life abundant that is essential to *doing the will of God*. In this sense ethical reflection has a negative task. It shows us what we are unable to do in ourselves in our current condition. It acts as a form of the law, as pedagogue, a teacher that leads us to Christ by showing us repeatedly how far short we fall of the glory of God. It may serve as a critique of our false notions of what is right and good. In our fallen state, we do not have clarity as to the will of God anymore. That only comes by the work of the Spirit in the body of Christ.

Still, we need to be clear. This is not a counsel of despair, as though we are excused from seeking to know and do the will of God. God has spoken definitively in Jesus Christ and through the Holy Scriptures. In listening to biblical texts and following them as faithfully and obediently as we can, we display the transforming power of grace. Grace brings us back again and again to our need for forgiveness and cleansing. At the same time, it enables us to be the “new Creation” of God, walking in the Spirit and bearing the fruits of the Spirit in every good work. As those saved by grace, we are God’s handiwork “created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (Ephesians 4:10).

The Nature and Meaning of “Ethics” in the Western Tradition

The word “ethics” is derived from a Greek verb: εἰοθα (*eiōtha*) with the corresponding noun, τοεθοζ (*to athos*). It originally meant “dwelling” or “stall.” The picture behind it was the sheltering shed in which an animal was kept to protect it from the storms and weather that could kill it. In this sense, the earliest notion is that of a sheltering stability, a zone of safety, necessary if life is to flourish.

The verb root εἰοθα means “to be accustomed to” or “to be wont to.” It has the sense of a custom or convention that provides a means for meeting fundamental human needs. This suggests the analogy between the function of social customs in the arena of human culture and the stall for providing security and stability for the domestic animals. Social customs provide a place of safety, security and flourishing for human life and the goods that make human life abundant.

When τοεθοζ (*to athos*) was translated into Latin, the word *mos /moralis*³ (gen.) was used, a word from which we get the English term “morality.” There has never been a great deal of clarity in the West as to the precise distinction between ethics and morality. Diogenes Laertius classified ethics as a part of philosophy, specifically that part of philosophy that has to do with “life and with all that concerns us.” (Loeb Classical Library, *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, Bk. I, Prologue, par. 18)

If we let this past history determine our view, then ethics is concerned with the foundations of human life whereas morality has to do with rules, conduct or actual practice based on those foundations. Yet, over time the word morality came to find its center in conduct that responds to custom whereas ethics had to do with conduct responding to reason (that is, reasoned reflection on the foundations and principles of human action). However, most of the time “ethics” and “morals” are used nearly interchangeably in English. Therefore, the two terms (ethics, morality) are very close. Different authors will define and relate the two terms in various ways. In this module, we will use them nearly interchangeably.

If we use this history we might say that ethics is concerned with that which gives security and stability to human life, that which holds society together and provides the context within which human life as authentically and fully human can flourish. From a Christian point of view, knowledge of what is authentically and fully human comes to us from the revelation we have in the Scriptures. There we discover the larger story of Creation, fall, redemption, the redeemed community and the ultimate renewal of all things in the coming Kingdom of God. It is that story that provides the fundamental framework by which we understand the foundations and principles of human life that correspond to the essential design of the Creator for us.

Ethical theories about the foundations and principles of human life are strongly related to what one takes to be the most important considerations about human life. By way of illustration, we can point to the fact that there are at least three very different ways of organizing such an answer in Western thought. Its philosophy has different visions of what is important in life simply in response to defining a final end or goal of human nature:

- (1) **Aristotle** belongs to a tradition of philosophy that bases itself on the premise that all human beings seek **happiness**. The nature of the good life is determined in this tradition by the

³ The Latin means an established practice, custom or usage. It is the habits, manners or customs of a people. Ethics for Living and Leading, Version 3.0

notion of happiness (the good life means the life in which all the powers of the person are fully developed and deployed, realizing the end of a genuinely human life—a “happy” life in the sense of a complete fulfillment of human powers).

- (2) Aristotle’s teacher looked at the matter somewhat differently. **Plato** uses the concept of **order** as the central integrative principle (the good life is one that is ordered and orderly with all parts of our being and all parts of our society ordered and contributing properly to a greater whole). What produces the good life and the good social order may not lead to happiness as such, and happiness cannot be definitive of what is good for humans.
- (3) The **Enlightenment** uses **freedom** as its organizing principle (the good life is the life of freedom and the true human is the autonomous, self-directing adult). The modern world has emphasized freedom (understood as autonomy) as the principle good that is the goal of human life. The assumption is that happiness will come as a by-product of each of us defining for ourselves the limits and aspirations of our own lives.

To some extent this reflects the fact that ethics is concerned with what is right, what is good, what is valued and finally with some totality we might call the life that is truly blessed. Ethics has focused on the *right*. The pursuit of the *good* is a quest that occurs when we seek those things that fulfill human nature, especially that good that is the most important or highest matter of self-realization. *Values* refer to things that we cherish as human beings. The *blessed* or happy life is a way of summarizing and pointing to a quality of life that brings the deepest levels of satisfaction and joy.

Christian ethics is concerned with all four of these matters, believing that the right and the good are not opponents in the creational will of God nor in the redemptive drive to bring all things back from their captivity to sin and its corruptions. We currently live in a world where what is good for us may not always appear to be the good. Pain is present and is not always itself evil but an expression of something that is delivering us from evil (just as the pain a surgeon inflicts in rooting out a cancer in us is a deliverance, a good, despite the pain inflicted). What we ought to value, what is of true and lasting value is quite confused so that we are prone to cherish what we ought to abhor. We all find the struggle of life to challenge us deeply when it comes to experiencing deep, authentic happiness. It is not a simple or direct by-product of a few positive thoughts and the following of a code book of moral principles.

Nonetheless, Christian ethics claims that we find the elements of an answer to the right, the good, to values and the happy life, in its Scriptures, the Old and New Testaments. These elements are given to us in story, in models and examples, in commands, rules and laws, in proverbs and song, in visions and prophetic utterances and in letters. What we must seek to do in Christian ethics is make sense of the variety of materials given to us for our guidance and instruction in what is good and what is evil.

Appendix B: Worldviews and Ethics

I. An African Worldview

Why do we often find it difficult to live as God wants us to live and thus fall short of all that God designed us to be and to enjoy? One reason is because of our natural tendency to put ourselves and the groups to which we belong at the center of our lives rather than God. But even when we want to obey God and to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ we find obstacles not only within our self-centered, flawed human nature but also in the habits, practices and ways of thinking of our society. Our manner of treating other people that we learned as we grew up is not all in harmony with the ways of God. Our parents, our families, our schools, our religious leaders, our tribal chiefs, our peers in society, our employers, and our political authorities have all taught us ways of thinking and acting that work against some of the commandments that the God of the Bible has given us. This is true in every society, time and place. These kinds of influences always pose problems for those who follow Jesus faithfully.

The pressure to conform to what others expect of us is often very strong. In fact, to go against the will of our families or our ethnic group or our religious leaders can actually be dangerous. During the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 people who refused to participate in the slaughter were considered enemies and killed by members of their own tribe. If obeying God’s commands brings us into conflict with the values and habits of our social group we become vulnerable to loss of status and respect, loss of security, loss of membership in the group, or even loss of life.

Many of the patterns of thinking and acting in African families and societies are in harmony with God’s commands. Respect for parents and elders, sharing of resources with those in need, the high value placed on human relationships, and many other values parallel biblical teachings. For this we are grateful. But in every society there exist ways of thinking and acting that contradict God’s will. The roots of these wrong attitudes and actions are often to be found in beliefs we hold that do not reflect the truth about God, ourselves and the world. The false beliefs need to be exposed to the light of God’s Word so that we can clearly see the difference between right paths and wrong paths and choose the paths of moral faithfulness to him.

In Unit 3 we considered a Christian worldview and its influence on ethics. We would like to analyze several other worldviews and the ethical patterns that spring from them. Then we can examine their impact on Christians in Africa and elsewhere. The following analysis cannot perfectly describe all African contexts because of the great cultural diversity that exists in Africa. But, in the light of the Scriptures we will attempt to evaluate a number of traditional beliefs and practices that are relatively typical of Africa in order to better distinguish between ways that set us against the God of biblical revelation and ways that help us do his will.

African worldview: foundation of traditional ethics in Africa

By Paul Mpindi

Introduction

Strictly speaking, there is no African worldview that presents a unified vision of the universe for all peoples of the continent. Rather, there are multiple African worldviews, different readings of the world by each tribe and ethnic group. However, many scholars agree that in spite of the diversity of the tribes throughout the continent, the careful student of African cultures will notice a constant, central line that seems to run through the different worldview systems. Various African worldviews all seem to include a group of beings who hold power and supernatural forces on which depend the equilibrium and harmony of both African and world-wide community. In other words, the African worldviews are all dependent upon a basic hierarchy of beings who support and maintain universal order and harmony.

The key word that situates, explains and localizes these different beings that compose the African worldview is the word "harmony." As in Egypt, where the worldview is characterized by Maat, or in Israel where the ideal view of the world and society is represented by Shalom, (the notion of equilibrium, stability, complete well-being of life), in Africa, the worldview is controlled by the idea of harmony. For Africans, in order for life to be good, it must be harmonious in all its aspects. According to the African worldview, a harmonious life is not the result of the coordinated work of man to render his life better. Harmony, in the African view of the world, depends upon the balance and stability of all the forces of the universe. In other words, harmony experienced in the life of an individual results from the harmony between the individual and the different members of his or her community; the harmony between the community of the living and the community of the recently deceased; the harmony between the recently deceased and those who have been dead for a long time and have been integrated into the world of the domain of the ancestors.

An African worldview is fundamentally based on hierarchical relationships of beings according to their power and force in the world of the living. The hierarchy of beings in an African worldview is a descending one. It begins with the Supreme Being, continues with spiritual intermediaries (spirits and ancestors), and ends with human mediators (fetichists and elders of the community). The following paragraphs provide a brief analysis of the different elements of an African worldview and their impact on the moral life of traditional and modern African people.

A. The Supreme Being: God

In spite of their different nuances, all African worldviews begin with an affirmation of the existence of the Supreme Being, the existence of God. The Supreme Being is known by the Bakongos as Nzambi, by the Bangala as Nzakomba, by the Akans as Onyame, by the Ewe as Mawu, etc.

In an African worldview, God, the Supreme Being, is One, uncreated and creator of all that exists. God is the Supreme Being because he is "force." God is force because he is the ultimate power from which all derive supernatural and natural powers that impact the life of the human community. An African worldview localizes God, the Supreme Being, in the heavens, the distant and inaccessible domain from which he communicates his power in favor of human beings through a chain of powerful beings, the mediators.

But why does almighty God live in the heavens so far from humans that they are incapable of entering into direct contact with him? Here the multiplicity of African traditions furnishes multiple replies to the question. Many Creation stories explain the transcendence of the Supreme Being as a consequence of the unintentional mistake of man. For some, the transcendence of the Supreme Being is explained as the consequence of his aversion to the noise of mortar and pestles made by women in their daily cooking. The Ashanti of Ghana, for example, explain how God went away in the following manner. In the marvelous past, God lived near humans, surrounding them with his presence. One day a vigorous young wife, preparing fufu by pounding manioc in her mortar, lifted her pestle so high that it hit God in his celestial location. God was irritated and so retreated into his own heaven. In order to show his indignation and anger toward the human community, God from then on sent lightening and rain to dampen humans.

Others consider God's distancing himself as the result of human drunkenness and insults against the divine mediators. Drunken men would have soiled the heavens, considered to be the face of the gods, by rubbing their dirty hands on it. As a result, God, the Supreme Being, accompanied by his celestial guests, retired to the deep heavens to avoid being polluted by the impurity of humans. Thus, in spite of

their diversity, all the African Creation stories explain the transcendence of God as the result of the unintended mistakes of man. Because of the imprudence of man and his erratic behavior God, who until then had lived in the midst of the village community, retired from an earthly domain and enclosed himself in a celestial domain, from then on inaccessible to human beings.

However, if God distanced himself from the human community, how could the community continue to live in balance and harmony without the benefit of God's positive action, he who is the creative force and origin of the harmony of the entire universe? African worldviews introduced divine and human mediators, spirits and ancestors who placed themselves between God and the human community to make possible the immanence [close proximity or presence] of God's action. In other words, African worldviews continue to affirm the active presence of God in favor of the human community, but the active presence of God in human affairs is manifested indirectly through the assistance of mediators. The mediators who convey the power of the Supreme Being to the human community are of two sorts, divine mediators and human mediators.

B. Mediators between the Supreme Being and the African community

In the preceding lines we have indicated that in Africa there exist two classes of mediators: divine and human.

1. Divine mediators

a. Spirits

The spirits are the first mediators between God and the human community. Spirits are the second power after God. Among the Akan of Ghana, they are called "Nyame", "the children of the Supreme Being." In truth, the spirits are not powers in and of themselves but are simply the vehicles of the power of the Creator toward the human community. Because of the diversity of functions and services that they render to the community, the spirits are linked with certain activities and to certain supernatural phenomena and are popularly called "gods." Thus, Africans worship a number of gods in reference to their different existential needs. African hunters have a god of the hunt; African farmers have a god of the earth; African traders have a god of negotiation, etc.

So, in spite of their names, African gods are not God in the African mentality. African gods are powerful mediators who are worshipped simply because they are the representatives of the Supreme God from whom they convey protective or destructive power, but because of their proximity to the Creator, these spirits are so powerful that direct contact with mortal humans could harm them. So, the ancestors often relay their mediating action.

b. The ancestors

The ancestors are the port of entry for the divine into the human world and the port of exit for humans toward the divine. The ancestors are the elders of the community who have died a good death, that is, who have lived in harmony with the community as a whole during their time on earth and who have not injured any member of the village community. The bad, those who have worked against a good life for their neighbors, even if they die old, do not join the community of ancestors. Instead, they join the community of demons, the negative forces that destabilize the community of the living. The bad, the demons, are opposed by the ancestors, who have the help of the good spirits, with the aim of protecting the human community from their evil actions.

So, the ancestors are the humans who have lived a good life and through death have joined the domain of the gods. Their most important role is intercession to the spirits and to God himself, in favor of the human community. According to Mbiti, the ancestors are the perfect intermediaries in the African worldview because they speak a double language; they speak the language of the humans whom they recently left through physical death. However, they also speak the language of the spirits, the language of God, the Supreme Being in the domain where they live from now on.

Africans worship the ancestors, giving them sacrifices and offerings because having lived in the community, the ancestors are the best protectors of their interests with respect to the different "forces" and "powers" that rule the universe. The offerings and sacrifices made to ancestors are to encourage their ministry of intercession, but the ancestors don't intercede only to the gods in favor of the living. Because they are part of the supernatural world, ancestors have the power to reward the living when they take care of them through offerings of libations or to punish them when they neglect to give them offerings or to follow the traditions and taboos that they have established. For the majority of Africans the different blessings of life—progeny, good harvests, health, the punishment of the wicked (those who don't live according to tradition)—come from the activity of the deceased ancestors favoring

the community of the living. Among the Akan of Ghana, for example, the girl who prepares to leave her parental roof the day of her marriage will not omit giving an offering of libations and a prayer calling on the ancestors to grant their blessings on new couple. The ancestors are invoked in the following terms: *"Nanamon (i.e., ancestors), your daughter by the name of...is today married and is being taken to the matrimonial home. We ask for blessings on this union. We ask for children, children in abundance, twins. Give her material wealth so that not only we all shall enjoy the fruits of it, but also that there may be children to continue the family tradition and give you due honor."*

So, the African individual may not have any relation with the supernatural world or with the spirits and the Supreme Being without passing through the mediation of the ancestors. Any attempt to bypass the ancestors in seeking the intervention of God in the world of men is to attract their anger and punishment. Many prayers formulated by the Africans are addressed only to ancestors, who in their turn intercede in favor of him who has already nourished the ancestors through libations and sacrifices. The ancestors are therefore powerful mediators and may not be approached by just anyone without risking harm.

Why, then, are ancestors key mediators in an African worldview? The important position occupied by ancestors in an African worldview comes from the fact that because they have lived and exercised the function of elders in the community, the ancestors are the founders of the traditions and taboos that guide the whole of individual and communal life of the African. The ancestors establish the moral, religious and customary values on which the life of the village is founded. The ancestors are the founders of families, of clans, of tribes and of villages. Ancestors are the pillars, the hinges of existence in Africa because they understand the whole of human reality. The ancestors are the foundations of the African community because in the past they lived in the natural world and in the present live in the supernatural world, the world of the gods. They are, therefore, powerful mediators, the door of entry for the living into the world of the gods.

2. Human mediators

Directly tied to the positive mediation of the ancestors are the human mediators. There exist in the majority of the African communities seven kinds of human mediators who enter into contact with the ancestors to the profit of the community—the traditional priest, the diviner, the traditional healer, the fetisher (sometimes called witch doctor), the village chief, the elders of the village and the heads of families.

a. The traditional priest

The traditional priest is the person responsible to carry out the rites of entry to the ancestors in order to seek their mediation with the spirits in favor of the individual or community that has offended the Creator. The traditional priest's function is often hereditary. The knowledge of the rites and incantation formulas is passed from one generation to another for the survival of the community. The function of the priest, being highly sacred, may not be assumed by any but one particular family, enjoying often the attention and respect, if not the fear, of the village community. The individual or the community, victim of the misfortune of life, seeks the intervention of the priest for the restoration of the broken harmony of his life. However, often the priest who knows the rites and formulas for resolving such problems doesn't always know which rite to use for a misfortune difficult to understand. So, the diviner intervenes if the traditional priest himself doesn't have divinatory knowledge.

b. The diviner

The diviner is often called a medium. The diviner or medium is the person gifted with supernatural capacities that permit him to enter into a trance and to be possessed by the spirit of the gods or of the ancestors. The diviner in a trance enters the distant and mysterious domain of the spirits and receives messages in favor of the individual or community that is suffering. Through the medium, the spirits or the ancestors reveal the cause of a sickness or a death or a natural calamity. To the diviner the spirits also reveal the punishment to inflict on the guilty person or community or the sacrifice to offer to appease them.

In the structure of the traditional African society, the diviner functions often as an assistant to the priest; the diviner assists in the diagnosis of the cause of the suffering and identifies the appropriate sacrifice to offer. Often in the traditional African sacrificial system one individual, the traditional priest, may also be gifted with divining powers.

c. The traditional healer

The traditional healer is the person in the village who is gifted with rare natural and supernatural knowledge. The healer is the person who has mastered nature; he knows the

plants, herbs, mosses and healing clays. The botanical, zoological and geological knowledge of the healer is real and can be felt. The healer knows the natural juices and beverages capable of healing or killing. The natural knowledge of the healer is based on supernatural knowledge. The traditional healer receives knowledge of medicinal plants from the ancestors, protectors of the clan. The majority of the traditional African healers also have divinatory powers that render them much more effective in the diagnosis of the sicknesses of their patients.

d. The fetisher

The function of the fetisher is somewhat complex. It includes the functions of the traditional priest in the invocation of certain incantations and practical rituals; the functions of the diviner in entering into contact with the supernatural world in order to diagnose the nature of the misfortune in question; the functions of the traditional healer in knowing the medicinal plants in case of physical problems; and finally the capability of casting spells when necessary to combat sorcerers. The primary role of the fetisher is to ward off the misfortune that is affecting the individual or the community, but his role also includes defending the individual and the community against those who would cast damaging magic spells on them. His role also involves casting even more deadly spells on the perpetrator in retaliation. So, the fetisher plays the role of defending the individual and the community in the face of evil attacks from their enemies. The fetisher is capable of doing so because he holds esoteric knowledge that enables him to release the positive power of the spirits in favor of the individual and the community or the negative power of the demons against the enemies of his patients.

e. The village chief

In the traditional African worldview the village chief is not, strictly speaking a mediator of the power of the gods for the community. He is, on the contrary, the temporal representative of the community before the gods. As representative of the community, the village chief is the guarantee of the tradition of the ancestors, the law and the customary practices that guide the village or clan. The village chief has the responsibility of applying the demands of the tradition and of the gods in order to assure the harmony of the community. To be effective, the function of the village chief requires an opening to and a knowledge of the supernatural world, even if this knowledge is only partial. In other words, the ideal village chief is the one who is at the same time the civil and customary administrator of the population and to some extent a fetisher, a traditional healer, a diviner and a traditional priest. In brief, the ideal chief is one who has the capacity to see and to understand what is going on in the natural world but also to see and understand what is going on in the supernatural world.

f. The village elders

The elders of the village are the assistants of the village chief. They are his eyes and ears to hear and see what in the village might break the harmony of the community and weaken it. Like the village chief, the elders guarantee the traditional order instituted by the ancestors. They must consequently function to some extent as fetisher, traditional healer, diviner and traditional priest. The natural and supernatural knowledge of the village elders are for assuring the protection and continuity of the village community.

g. The family head

That which the village chief and the elders do for harmony and protection at the village level the family head does at the level of the family. In African tradition, the head of the family is the person responsible for the respect and maintenance of the customs left by the ancestors. The family head sees that no member of his family is the cause of a misfortune either for the family or for the rest of the community. To carry out his task, the family head is not a fetisher or a diviner or a priest. Nevertheless, to be an effective protector, the family head should be gifted with a double vision. He needs to be capable of seeing and understanding what is going on in the world of the living but also what is coming from the supernatural world.

The Goal of Life

Thus, the hierarchy of beings mentioned above contributes to one single goal, the conservation and promotion of harmony (or well-being) in the life of the individual and of the village community. It is important to mention here that the harmony sought in an African worldview implies the absence of suffering at both individual and communal levels. In other words, for the African, harmony means that the young woman newly married becomes pregnant in the first months of her marriage. It means also that she carries her pregnancy to full term without great difficulty; that she gives birth to a healthy child without too

much pain; that the child grows up without often falling ill, etc. Harmony means for the African that no member of the community falls ill for a long period of time. Harmony means that the agricultural activities, hunting and fishing go along normally without material or human loss. Harmony means, finally, that no member of the community experiences a premature death, and that if death arrives, it touches only those who have reached old age and are full of days. Death, a good death, is one that strikes only those full of days. The death of old persons is good because it is an open door toward the domain of the ancestors for those who have lived a good life on earth.

The immediate consequence of the understanding of life as harmony, rendered possible by the positive activity of the Supreme Being, expressed through the channels of divine and human mediators, is the utilitarian function of African religion. African religion is utilitarian in that it only exists to repair or prevent unfortunate events that destabilize harmony in the life of the individual and the community. It is recognized that the African is profoundly religious, but it is important to mention that the profound religiosity of the African doesn't come from his love or his attachment to the Supreme being or to the spirits or the ancestors. African religion is utilitarian because the African invokes, prays, sacrifices, respects taboos before the god or gods not because he loves them and wants to serve them. The African appeals to ancestors and to spirits, as well as to the Supreme Being, with the single goal of interesting them in his cause and in pushing them to help. In other words, if he could live a harmonious life without such help, then he would have no need of ancestors, spirits or the Creator. Africans would be true atheists in such a case. So, the African doesn't seek God, the Creator, through his traditional mediators except for the single reason of asking him for social liberation or for the power to protect him from all misfortune. In other words, the African doesn't love God for nothing. He always loves him for something immediate, tangible, visible and palpable in his life. Is he sick? He invokes God through the ancestors and spirits. He offers him sacrifices in order that he will cure him. Is the village experiencing drought? The community sacrifices so that the ancestors will invoke the spirits and so the spirits will invoke the creator God so that he will make it rain.

Think About It

Answer Box # 1

Is this idea of seeing God primarily as a way to meet my own needs part of your tradition? What's wrong with this notion?

The constant search for balance and for harmony in the life of the African raises the question of the origin or the cause of disorder, of the evil that breaks the desired harmonious life. In other words, it's important to ask why the harmony in the life of the individual and the African community is often broken by sickness, suffering, natural calamities and death. What is the origin, if not the nature, of the physical, social and religious evil that affects man?

C. The conception of good and evil in the African worldview

Because of its utilitarian conception of religion, an African worldview explains good and evil as a function of their usefulness or harm to the life of the individual and the community. In other words, an action is good or bad, not in itself, but as a function of its consequences in the life, not first of all in the individual, but above all in the life of the community. So, a good action is good, not because it is good in itself, but because it reinforces the cohesion of the village community. As a result, no action is bad in itself unless it disturbs the traditional order established by the ancestors. The good of the community is the ideal followed in an African worldview. It is in favor of the good of the community that Africans pray, sacrifice and seek to appease the spirits and the gods who are angry with them. But why do ancestors, gods and the Supreme Being get angry against an individual and a village community and take away their harmony?

Traditional harmony is broken in the life of the individual or the African community if, and only if, one of its members, or the entirety of its members, violates the law and the customs established by the ancestors. The ancestors who participate in the divine force but who remember their kin in the world of the living, come in the night in dreams and visions to reveal to the village chief, to elders, to the fetisher, to the traditional priest, the desires and will of the gods. By a group of taboos the customary law establishes the negative words and actions not to be said or done so as to avoid the wrath of the gods. The responsibility of every individual and of the community as a whole is to respect the tradition of the ancestors. Evil and

suffering come, individual and communal harmony is broken, when the ancestors are not obeyed, when the taboos are violated.

Of what do the taboos consist? Taboos form a body of words and actions not to be done in order to avoid irritating the ancestors and the gods who don't fail to punish those who disobey them and thus bring unbalance to the individual or the community. The taboos are founded in the traditional wisdom based on observation and experience of daily life. By observation the ancestors have identified the relationship between the cause and effects of daily experience. A certain word, spoken in the morning or at night, is followed by such-and-such a psychosomatic reaction that harms the individual and the community. Such an action done in a given context produces a negative result in the life of the individual and the community. Because the ancestors did not understand the "scientific" reasons that link the causes to the effects that have negative consequences in the life and consciousness of the individual, they created narratives, mythical reasons, and taboos that forbid a certain word or a certain action. Thus, the pregnant wife is forbidden to walk for several hours. Why? Because the gods don't like pregnant women to go looking for their husbands. The disobedient wife will be surely struck by the gods; her feet will swell! The taboo is thus created, forbidding the forced march of women because the ancestors had noticed the relationship between the cause: a prolonged walk, and the effect: swollen feet. Thus, not understanding the scientific cause of edema, the ancestors created a taboo to support their customary prohibition.

Taboos function as the narrative support, the justification or rationale for behavior prohibited by the ancestors. The taboos form the foundation of religion and of traditional morality in Africa. In Africa, the individual is forbidden to worship a particular god, to eat a certain food, to speak a particular word, or to perform a certain action simply because the ancestors have ordered it. So, an action is good, not because it is good in itself, but because it has been commanded by the ancestors. The ancestors have ordered all taboos for the sole reason of promoting harmony in the life of the individual and the village community. For the Nuer of Sudan, for example, the taboo, "thek", represents the quasi-religious respect that the individual should have toward the things and actions indicated by the ancestors as contrary to the harmony of the community. Whoever violates a taboo exposes himself and the rest of the community to impurity with regard to the sacred, and ritual impurity attracts the anger of the ancestors and the gods.

In conclusion, good and evil are relative and utilitarian in an African worldview. The good is good, not because it is good in itself, but because it has been judged useful and profitable by the ancestors for the life of the individual and the village community. Good and evil are therefore realities that are limited to the context of each village, each tribe, and each clan. There are numerous examples to show that an action judged good in a village or tribe is considered bad in another village and tribe. There exist tribes in Africa for whom the act of stealing is laudable if it is done against an unknown person, a foreigner. There exist cultures in Africa that permit their young men and young women to freely experiment with their sexuality before marriage without it being considered bad. There exist tribes that permit their important guests to pass the night with the older girls of the family without it being considered a violation of the moral order. In short, in Africa an action is good because it conforms to the tradition of the ancestors. The ancestors are the guarantee of the moral, religious and customary order of the community.

Think About It

Answer Box # 2

How might this utilitarian notion of good and evil influence moral behavior? Can you write an example of an action you have seen that is culturally acceptable but that violates Jesus' command of loving God and neighbor?

The immediate consequence of the relative and ritual conception of good and evil in an African worldview is the absence of the notion of original sin (the belief that humans are born with a nature that tends toward sin) such as is taught in the Bible. Since evil in an African worldview is essentially the disturbance here and now of the harmony of the universe, it is therefore not a fatal flaw, not an inherent disposition inherited from the ancestors. In an African worldview evil is not a sin committed against a god or against the supreme God. In Africa evil is a fault, an inadvertence, an unfortunate "faux-pas," but not fatal, and is always accompanied by a solution, a ritual solution understood and practiced by the traditional priest. Thus, even though bad, the evil, the fault, the bad action that brings the wrath of the gods and with it the rupture of creational harmony, is not a dramatic, irreparable act from the human point of view. In the African worldview all faults are pardonable with the aid of rites of reparation established by

the ancestors and practiced by the priests. Thus, in Africa, men do not fall into a fault because they are born sinners, but simply by inadvertence, by negligence. Consequently, the traditional African doesn't suffer from an original guilt. He does not carry within himself a sinful nature, an evil nature.

Africans are born and raised in balance and harmony. His person, his nature is not sinful. His world is not bad but rather harmonious. The evil that has entered the world, the evil that breaks creational harmony, though unfortunate, is not fatal, because it is always dominated and mastered through traditional ritual.

D. African worldview in the light of biblical worldview

Rereading the worldview of an African in the light of the Bible reveals elements of continuity and discontinuity between the worldviews. The following paragraphs treat the understanding of God, of man, and of good and evil in two worldviews.

1. The Supreme Being in the Bible and in African worldview

The first point of visible convergence between biblical teaching and traditional African teaching is the existence and nature of God as Supreme Being. In the Bible, God is presented as the eternal God who exists in and of himself. He is the first and the last. (Isaiah 44:6) He has neither beginning nor end. In an African worldview God is also described as the Supreme Being. The Bakongos describe him as the one above and below apart from whom no other exists.

Because he is the Supreme Being, God is the creator of all that exists in the visible and invisible world. The Bible teaches that visible reality, the universe, comes from the creative activity of God. In addition to the visible world, the biblical God is also the creator of the invisible world, the spiritual world. Visible celestial armies (the stars) and invisible celestial armies (angels) exist by the creative activity of God. (Genesis 1:1-31) According to the Bible, God is not only the creator of the universe, he also supports and maintains its existence by his wisdom. An African worldview shares a similar vision of the Supreme Being. In Africa, the Supreme Being is the origin of the visible and invisible world. He is also the guarantee of the stability and the continuity of the universe and of the village community.

A second element of convergence between the Supreme Being described in the Bible and in African tradition is in the notion of his transcendence. The biblical God, like the God of African tradition, is above all the Transcendent Being, the one who lives in light inaccessible to humanity. And in the Bible as well as in the African tradition God's separation from the world of humans is the result of the fault of man. The account of man's sin in the Bible, as in the ancient African myths, explains the distance of the Supreme Being with respect to human beings. In the biblical description of the consequences of man's sin, the entrance into the Garden of Eden where man and God met was barred by angels armed with a flaming sword. (Genesis 3:24) In the African stories, great rivers that are impossible to cross bar entrance to the divine domain.

The first difference between the biblical and African worldview is found in the significance of the fault that caused the spiritual separation between God and man. In the Bible, the first sin was an act of open rebellion of the creature against the Creator. Because of this rebellious act against the express order of God forbidding the eating of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the disobedience of man was severely punished. God's punishment affected not only the man himself but also the whole of the universe. The animal kingdom was struck through the punishment against the serpent who, from then on, had to crawl on his belly and eat the dust of the earth. The woman from then on had to give birth in pain and be emotionally dependent on her husband.

The vegetable kingdom was also struck by God's punishment, requiring toil and sweat for man to harvest its fruit. The entire universe was marked by death. Finally, rebellious man, deprived of material blessings, was struck by the worst punishment of all: spiritual separation from God. The creator God who had appeared in the Garden of Eden each evening to commune with his creature became inaccessible. And human life lived far from the Creator became a burden, a permanent disorder that manifested itself in the murder of Abel by his brother Cain.

Contrary to the catastrophic image presented in the Bible regarding the consequences of human disobedience in the beginning, an African traditional worldview does not present the first fault of man as an act of rebellion against his creator. The first human fault that caused the Supreme Being to withdraw from man is not really considered to be a fault or a sin against the creator with grave consequences. It was rather an inadvertence, an inconvenience, a small discomfort that man created for God, either by the incessant noise of traditional villages too near the heavens or by the women's pestles bumping the heavens.

As a result, an African worldview does not consider man to be guilty before God. The distance between Creator and creature is not synonymous with divine wrath against the human race as the Bible teaches. (Romans 3:23-24) It is rather a convenient retreat of the Supreme Being, thus preventing humans from disturbing his solitude. Because the African doesn't suffer guilt before his Creator, he has no need of spiritual salvation in order to restore communion with his Creator. An African worldview affirms the continued transcendence of the Supreme Being, remaining permanently at a distance that will never be

bridged either by man or God. However, the distance itself is not a source of anxiety for the African because this distance is overcome by the presence of the mediators who convey the positive power of God into the domain of the living.

2. The divine mediators in the Bible and in an African worldview

The Biblical worldview reveals the God of the Bible as not only transcendent but also immanent. In the introduction to the Letter to the Hebrews the author writes:

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. (Hebrews 1:1-3 NIV-UK)

In the Bible, the distant God came near "in various ways." The appearances of God in the Old Testament occur in the following three forms: he speaks to his people and communicates to them his will through prophets such as Moses; he also appears indirectly in the Old Testament in the form of an angel, as the Angel of the Lord, as he did with Abraham concerning Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18-19); finally, God appears more directly to his people through an epiphany as he did to Moses in the burning bush (Exodus 3).

In addition to these three principal mediations of the immediate presence of God, the Old Testament adds another series of human mediators who convey the presence and Word of God to his covenant community. The priests and the elders of Israel are all representatives of God to his elect people. All the mediators of the Old Testament were charged to convey the Word and the saving power of God in the life of his people. The angel of the Lord intervened often in Old Testament accounts in order to bring deliverance to his people. The deliverance of the people by God corresponded to the punishment of their enemies by the activity of the angel of the Lord. The prophet intervened through his prophetic Word to revive the people from their spiritual stupor and to bring them back to the path of faithfulness to the Lord. The prophetic message always contained an element of judgment either against Israel or against the enemies of the sacred nation, along with an element of final salvation in favor of the elect people. The priest conveyed divine wisdom, the source of Shalom at the individual and national level. The priest was also the guarantee of the availability of the Supreme Being through the sacrificial and ritual system of the holy nation. The elders of the village who functioned as both traditional judges and juries at the gate of the city exercised their function as socio-religious controllers who supervised the application of the Word of God in the daily life of his people.

However, in spite of their effectiveness in communicating the presence and Word of God in the life of his people, the author of the letter to the Hebrews considered all the mediations just mentioned as insufficient. He writes that in the last times, God revealed his immanence, his presence in the world, through the manifestation of his eternal Son, the Christ "whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being..." (Hebrews 1:2-3)

The eternal Son of God is presented in the New Testament as God himself who took human form with the purpose of sharing and conquering the misery that has invaded us since the first sin. The Christ of the Gospels is not only a mediator among mediators. He is "the" unique mediator who came manifesting the immanence of God. In Christ, God enters the world and the life of his worshippers to liberate them from the curse of the law and to give them the benediction of the new life received freely in him. As the Apostle Paul affirmed, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them..." (2 Corinthians 5:19)

Thus, in the New Testament the distance that appeared between God and man in the Garden of Eden has been overcome. In Christ, God has come back into the world to give life to those who receive him. The proximity of God in Christ is such that for those who receive his offer of grace, God doesn't just come near them, but he lives within them. In the Gospel of John, Jesus says, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word; and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode with him." (John 14:23)

Here, then, is the end of any possibility of continuity between biblical and African worldview. As in the biblical worldview, an African worldview is full of mediators, mediators who convey the power of the Supreme Being to the village community. As indicated above, even if they are called gods, the spiritual mediators are not considered to be divine beings. According to African worldview, the mediators, in spite of their various services to the community, cannot erase the distance that separates the human community from the Divine Being. These mediators don't have the power or the function of bringing near the distant God. Their role is only to convey the power of the Supreme Being to the life of the community. The African Supreme God is inaccessible, incapable of becoming immanent.

Here revealed in all its clarity is the special mediation of Christ in the Bible that has no correspondence with a traditional African worldview. As we have already said, Christ is Emmanuel, "God with us." The concept of Emmanuel is completely absent from a traditional African worldview. There, the Supreme Being doesn't come toward man. Rather, it is man who must go toward the Supreme Being through the mediation of the ancestors and the spirits.

3. The impact of the uniqueness of Christ's mediation on biblical and African ethics

The study of African worldview has revealed the critical function played by the ancestors and the elders in establishing and regulating moral order in the traditional African society. It has already been stated that African morality is utilitarian because it is based on a utilitarian vision of religion. The ultimate aim of religion and of the African man's worldview is realizing individual and community harmony. In other words, the African individual and community worship the ancestors and offer sacrifices to the Supreme Being, but not out of love. The African has no spiritual love for the ancestors or for the Supreme Being. The African worships the ancestors and God, keeps their laws and customs, not because he loves them (in contrast to the psalmist in Psalm 119) but simply because the ancestors and God are the only ones who can guarantee the harmony and stability that he needs to live. Thus, the African is not profoundly religious as is often claimed. He is not profoundly moral either as is often claimed. African religiosity and morality does not rest on the love of the divinity or on the ideal of law or of justice. The religiosity and morality of the African rests on the love of himself and the desire to live a life of harmony, free from suffering. Thus, traditional religion and morality are fundamentally utilitarian.

It has also been shown above that the good is good, not in itself, but only to the extent that it contributes to the balance of the individual and the village community. Evil is evil, not in itself, but only in that which prevents harmonious individual and village community life. So, stealing is not bad in itself but only to the extent that it creates disorder in the life of a village community member.

By contrast, in the New Testament the uniqueness of the mediation of Christ brings all universal reality to his person. Christ is God become man in order to save humans from the captivity of sin. In the Gospels Christ affirmed that all the mediators apart from him are "thieves and robbers" and that he alone is the gate for his lambs, the only way, the truth and the life, that none comes to the Father except through him. (John 10:7-8; 14:6)

As a result, because of the perfection of his mediation and the uniqueness of his person, all those who want to follow him must not only deny themselves but also renounce dependence on their religious and social systems in order to enter his Kingdom. The members of his Kingdom are called to live from then on according the ethics of the Kingdom that he reiterated in his Sermon on the Mount. (Matthew 5-7) As already said, the ethic of the Kingdom is an ethic based on the character of God himself and reflected in the person and work of Jesus Christ, the only mediator between God and man. This is the same ethic that God had revealed to Moses in the Decalogue of the Old Testament, an ethic that reflects the character of God.

The uniqueness of the mediation of Christ, the only savior of humanity, raises the question of how to understand good and evil and the reality of the sin from which he came to liberate humanity. The Christ of the Bible did not die to save man from an ancient inadvertence (an unintentional mistake) but from the sin that made man a rebel against God. Christ came to reconcile man to God because of the continuing enmity caused by man's sin. So, an understanding of the person, work and new life brought by Christ is impossible if the nature of good, evil and sin is not well understood.

A study of African worldview reveals an inadequate notion of sin and its consequences in the relationship of man with God. In other words, the traditional African does not know from what grave danger Christ can deliver him since he does not consider himself a rebel against the Supreme Being. He believes he has not offended the Supreme Being but has simply made him uneasy, not by his sin but by his mistake.

As already mentioned, utilitarian religion gives rise to utilitarian ethics, founded on a notion of good and evil that is relative to the needs of the community. This making relative good, evil, sin and its consequences puts African worldview in conflict with the teaching of the Bible.

In the Bible, good, evil and sin are not subjective, relative ideas that change according to the desires or needs of the individual and community. Good, according to the Bible, is an unchanging reality. Good is good in itself. It is good for everyone, everywhere, because it is grounded in the nature and essence of the Supreme Being. The Bible teaches that good is good because it exists perfectly only in God who is the supreme good, though it is reflected in the commandments that he gave to his people. (Deuteronomy 30:15-20)

The immediate consequence of identifying good with the person of God is that human morality also needs to be rooted in the nature of God. Now the nature of God is revealed to us in the Bible. So, the Bible functions as the primary moral reference in order to guide human conduct and action. In other words, anyone who wants to know if an action is good or bad should refer to what the Bible teaches. In his letter to Timothy the Apostle Paul teaches: "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for

reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

In conclusion, it is correct to affirm that the Bible calls into question the utilitarian aspect of traditional religion and morality. Instead of the search for individual and community harmony as the foundation of good and evil as the traditional African worldview teaches, God, the Supreme Being, as revealed in the Bible is the foundation of Christian morality. The requirements of Christian morality are not only relevant for those who belong to the redeemed community but are also relevant for all humanity by virtue of their identity with the person of God who is the supreme good. The Bible calls into question not only African worldview but also every human worldview with the aim of transforming them toward the light of the being and nature of God revealed in Scripture. God, through his incarnation in Christ and revealed in the Bible, is the foundation of Christian ethics and of universal ethics.

E. The foundation of Christian ethics in African context

A comparative study of traditional African worldview in the light of biblical worldview reveals important elements of continuity and discontinuity for the writing of a Christian ethic in African context. The traditional African worldview does not first appear to be too far from a biblical worldview. Both worldviews are based on the person of the Supreme Being, Yahweh in biblical language and Nzambi or Nzapa or Zakomba or Mungu in African societies. The essence of the Supreme Being for traditional Africans corresponds in part to that of the biblical God. He is the Being above which no other can be conceived. Thus, the two worldviews profess both the transcendence (distance) and the immanence (proximity) of the Supreme Being. But an African worldview exhibits a divine transcendence that is absolute, unlike that of the God of the Bible. Through the unintentional action of the human community, the African Supreme Being became completely separated from man, beyond all possibility of reconciliation.

The God of the Bible, by contrast, manifests himself both as the God who is distant and the God who is near. In spite of his separation from humanity because of man's original disobedience, God did not totally distance himself from man. As the author of the letter to the Hebrews affirmed, God revealed himself to his people at different times and in different ways, but the final and complete revelation of God has been made in Christ, the eternal Son of God who came to fill the spiritual void that separated us from God. In Christ God reunites all things, "things in the heavens and things on the earth." (Ephesians 1:10) It is by virtue of the uniqueness of his person and work on behalf of humanity that Christ affirmed himself to be "the way, the truth and the life" and that "no one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)

The immediate consequence of the uniqueness of the mediation of Christ for the reconciliation of man to God is that this mediation renders void and invalid other mediation. Thus, the unique and complete mediation of Christ obliges those who say they belong to him to renounce those elements in their particular worldview that are in conflict with a biblical worldview and to adopt a worldview compatible with the reality of Christ. A biblical worldview becomes the foundation for the physical, spiritual and moral existence of the Church. So, a "worldview conversion" is needed for those Africans who are committed to following Christ. In African context, believers who give their lives to Jesus Christ as Lord need to make a commitment to renounce all aspects of their worldviews and worldviews that contradict the place of Christ in a biblical worldview.

A worldview conversion in African context does not mean the complete rejection of all traditional African values. Rather, it means the rejection of traditional African values that conflict with the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In African worldview, the roles of the mediators, the spirits and the ancestors, conflict with the Lordship of Christ. In the moral area, ancestors and their taboos function as the foundation of African moral life that in many respects contradicts biblical teaching. Therefore, for Christian Africans to be at the same time Christians and Africans, they must change the central part of their traditional worldview. In the place of spirits, genies and ancestors, from now there must on be found the unique person of Jesus Christ. Schematically, the necessary change from a traditional worldview to a Christian worldview can be seen as follows:

Traditional worldview hierarchy

Supreme Being
spirits, ancestors, village elders
village community
individual

Christian worldview hierarchy

Supreme Being
CHRIST
Christian community
village community
individual

Think About It

Answer Box # 3

1. Why is Dr. Mpindi proposing a cosmological conversion?
2. How might it change the way in which African Christians think about ethical behavior?

Worldview Change

In order for this worldview change to occur, Christ needs to be presented in all his power as is the case in the Gospels. The worldview conversion, foundation of a new African Christian ethic, finds its foundation in sound biblical theology. The Christ of the Gospels is presented as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29), but also as the strongman who comes to destroy the adversary who holds the souls of humans under his dominion. The Christ of the Gospels pardons sins, heals the sick, multiplies the bread, feeds the hungry and thirsty crowds and finally raises the dead.

A comparative study of Christ's function shows that he accomplishes and surpasses the functions filled by the mediators in an African worldview. Traditional African worldview teaches that Africans invoke the spirits and the ancestors when they are confronted with the different hazards of life such as sickness, famine, drought, sterility, death, etc. Christ is presented in the Gospels not only as the savior of souls but also as the savior of the body, the savior of all of man. In the Gospels Christ is not only the one who says, "my son, your sins are forgiven," but also the one who says to the paralytic, "Rise, and walk," and to Peter and his companions, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." (Luke 5:4, 20, 24) In short, the Christ of the Gospels is a holistic Christ, a Christ who comes to save man from all his problems, spiritual and physical.

Thus, the Christ of the new Christian African worldview is the universal Lord who comes to communicate to the African the seriousness of his spiritual separation from God that he seems to ignore, and the urgency of his conversion. The ears of the African need to resonate with the frightening words of the Apostle Paul, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23); "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). We have noted above that the traditional African does not have a sense of original and universal guilt. The Bible presents the human as a being in revolt, a rebel against his creator who lives in disobedience and whose soul is stained by sin. The African does not have this idea of open rebellion against his creator as the source of sin. The idea of the original fault, even if it exists in African myths, is less dramatic than in the Bible. In other words, traditional Africans do not feel themselves to be sinners to the point of having a conscience accused of sin against the Creator. No, the African Nzambi, Nzapa or Nzakomba is not, *a priori* angry with humans.⁴ To the contrary, he is an ally making available his power to counteract the action of demonic forces that are none other than deceased wicked humans who have been prevented from rejoining the happy community of the ancestors.

So, it's something new for the African to hear the Apostle Paul say, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) The biblical "all" is astonishing for the African who sees in the Creator an ally rather than someone who humans have made his adversary. The evangelistic task in an African context must therefore begin by introducing into the worldview of the Christian African the notion of the universal guilt of the human race. The African must understand that if he experiences physical sickness, demonic attacks and death, it is not because of the activities of the evil dead. It's really because of the sin committed by our first ancestors, Adam and Eve. The African who is deeply communal will not have great difficulty in identifying himself with the universal guilt of humanity. This understanding of universal guilt opens the door to understanding the universal grace of God manifested in the sacrifice of Christ. Jesus becomes the exceptional mediator, this Lamb of God, who takes away not only the sin of the village or clan but the sin of the whole universe. The ability of Jesus to remove the sin of all humanity places him above all traditional mediators whose activity is limited to members of the family and clan.

⁴ The African Creator God does not encounter us as sinners but as allies in the struggle against demonic forces. We are not sinners needing rescue from the bondage of sin.

However, the soul of the African saved from the pollution of sin dwells in a real body that lives in a hostile world. To attach himself exclusively to Christ, the spiritual mediator, changing his traditional worldview, the needs hope for the physical aspect of his salvation also.

To replace the traditional African worldview with a Christian African worldview, the foundation of Christian ethics in Africa, Christ the savior of the soul must also be presented as Christ the savior of the body. The New Testament presents Christ as the one who came to restore man in his totality. The inaugural message of Jesus in the synagogue of Nazareth was taken from the prophet Isaiah. Luke wrote:

He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The Scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:16-21)

Luke added the following account of the meeting between Jesus and the messengers sent by John the Baptist to discover whether he was indeed the long awaited Messiah. Luke writes:

John's disciples told him about all these things. Calling two of them, he sent them to the Lord to ask, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" When the men came to Jesus, they said, "John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, 'Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?'" At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind. So he replied to the messengers: "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor." (Luke 7:18-22)

These two passages show that the mission of Jesus was not only the spiritual liberation of man from the captivity of sin. The mission of Christ also addressed the liberation of man from the physical consequences of sin in his life such as sickness, demon possession and even hunger.

A Christ who travels the streets of the African cities, healing the sick, exorcising the demons, resurrecting the dead, distributing bread, offering work to miserable crowds, doing all this with power and authority, could not help but fulfill the African and render obsolete the power of the traditions that enclose him in syncretism.

This vision of the world where Christ reigns as King of kings and resolves all the problems of human suffering and injustice attracts us deeply. We have the biblical promises of such a world, and we have the testimony of the New Testament that Christ in his first coming manifested his power in various areas of human concern. So, it is justifiable to present Jesus Christ as savior of body and soul, of individual and society, even of all Creation. (Romans 8:18-25)

When are we going to experience the glory of all that? From time to time, through the direct intervention of God, we see in our lives now miracles similar to those Jesus accomplished when he was on earth. These interventions bring us joy and strengthen our faith, but these dramatic incidents are not yet universal, neither promised unconditionally to believers in Jesus. The universal reign of Christ awaits the hour when God will bring this present age to its conclusion and will inaugurate the new age to come, an age of the power always present in Jesus but of which we receive only a foretaste now.

Among the benefits that humans desire, Christ offers here and now the pardon of our sins and the restoration of relationship between us and God that our sins had broken. In Christ we are offered his Spirit as our comfort and as the source of the moral fruit he wants to bear in us. We are assured of his presence to the end of our life here on earth. He intercedes for us before the Father. In Christ we are protected now and forever from every power that would separate us from him and his love. Christ is preparing an eternal place for us. At his second coming we will be raised from the dead. He will be our confidence in the day of judgment. He responds to our prayers according to his will. He gives us his joy and peace as we live according to his commandments. His love for us will continue eternally, and he is committed to progressively changing us to reflect increasingly his character of love and justice.

What will it cost us to accept Christ's offer? First, that we recognize how our sins have separated us from God and that therefore we must repent and put our faith solely in Jesus Christ. There is no question of adding Jesus to our traditional beliefs and practices. He is the exclusive Savior, the exclusive mediator between the Supreme Being and us. Then, having begun by faith in Christ, we must continue by faith to show our love and gratitude by a new life of obedience to him and to his commandments. This commitment will put us in conflict with many of our traditional habits. We will be obliged to suffer at times the misunderstanding of our loved ones, even persecution from certain individuals or groups. We will be

committed to following the example of our Master who, here on earth, had no place to lay his head, who gave himself as a sacrifice for us all. Everyone will not take up their cross and follow this Jesus, but for those who accept this challenge to be a disciple of Jesus, this course in Christian ethics has been prepared in order to shed more light on their path.

Think About It

In the table below are found five ideas from Mpindi's description of an African worldview. Please fill in the blank cells with phrases that show similarities or differences with the dominant worldview of your culture.

	The African worldview	Similarities to my culture	Differences from my culture
Worldview structure	Hierarchy and Harmony		
Supreme Being	Distant creator		
Mediators	Divine (spirits and ancestors) and human		
Goal of life	Community and individual well-being		
Concept of good	Utilitarian (what serves our/my interests)		

II. Islam

In our readings we are seeking to become aware of the differences between Christian and non-Christian moral values and worldviews. These various sets of values that surround us in our world can influence Christian leaders and their coworkers either positively or negatively. Often the diversity of moral values that we encounter in our changing societies can be confusing. The result is that people may want to be faithful to a Christian ethic but find themselves thinking and acting according to non-Christian ethics and to the worldviews behind them. So, it is important to understand as much as possible the nature of the moral pressures under which we live and work. This will help us to discern the difference between the evil we wish to avoid and the good that we want to practice as followers of Jesus.

An Islamic Worldview

One contributor of alternative worldviews and ethics is Islam. Islam is a major religion in Africa and Asia today. It shares with Christianity belief in God as Supreme Being, eternal, all-powerful, all-knowing, far above this world yet seeing all that goes on within it. However, Islam does not share the Christian teaching that God is truly near to us or that he exists in three persons—the Creator (Father), Word (Son) and Spirit (Holy Spirit) so that there is within God fellowship, harmony, love and communication. Nor does Islam accept Christ as the divine, eternal Word of God expressed in fully human form, revealing to mankind what the invisible God is like.

Islam agrees that God created the world but not in a different state than it is now. Islam teaches that God created Adam but no differently than human beings are now. Humanity was created weak and in need of guidance and from the beginning experienced suffering and death. Islam does not agree with the biblical teaching that humans were created in God's image, for it teaches that God is entirely unlike man.

Islam denies that mankind fell from a previous spiritual condition and that since then humans are born with a sinful nature. It teaches rather that Adam repented of his disobedience and was forgiven. There was no spiritual fall, only a physical fall from the heavenly paradise to earth. Humans continue to be born with a good nature, free from sin, although they are weak and forgetful of God's laws.

From an Islamic perspective all people commit faults, but all don't commit transgressions that disqualify people for paradise. This is a much more optimistic view of humanity than the biblical view that teaches we all have gone astray (Isaiah 53), we have all sinned and are separated from God (Romans 3). In Islamic teaching God does not have a personal relationship with human beings because of his transcendent nature. In Biblical teaching God desires personal fellowship with people, but because of human sin, fellowship with God was broken and remains hindered. While Islam teaches that by right guidance and observing God's laws humans can please God, Scripture clearly states that we can do nothing of ourselves to make ourselves righteous and acceptable to God.

One of the great deceptions of Islam is the idea that if God so wills, one's good deeds will outweigh his bad deeds and bring him material blessings now and paradise in the end. There is no sacrifice for sin and no savior. God may forgive whomever He wants to forgive, but there is no assurance of salvation. By contrast, Scripture teaches that Jesus Christ died on the cross as the only perfect sacrifice for sin. This sacrifice benefits all who accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. This differs radically from the Islamic belief that Jesus did not die and that someone else died in his place. Consequently, there is no sacrifice that can atone for sin. No one can help a person at the final judgment. According to Scripture, the resurrection of Jesus demonstrated that he is the Messiah, the righteous Son of God who has conquered sin and death and will come again to rule and judge all mankind. Islam contends that Jesus ascended into heaven without death and resurrection. He will come again to rule and make everyone Muslims, and then he will die.

Ethical Implications

There are many more differences between Islamic and Christian teaching, but here we are concerned with the impact these different worldviews have for Christian ethics. In Islam the basis of ethics is fear of God and the desire for his approval. Ethical behavior is a fulfillment of duty and obedience to God's laws. It is motivated by the importance of observing the religious rules of behavior and is motivated by fear of the Last Day. In Christian teaching the basis of ethics is love for God and gratitude for what He has done. Ethical behavior is an expression of love for God and fellow humans, in response to the experience of God's grace. It is motivated by a changed nature, the result of one's spirit being renewed through the Holy Spirit who dwells in those who are in Christ. In Christ people are freed from the condemnation of their sin so that they can begin to obey the moral law of God with joy and love from the heart.

Islam teaches the following:

God also gave man the basic knowledge of "good" and "bad" at the time of his inception. Thus, according to Islam, every individual has been bestowed a clear

standard of judgment of “good” and “evil” by God. ...It is precisely for the stated reason that man, on the Day of Judgment, shall have no excuse for any voluntary and conscious deviation from these values in his life, even if he has remained ignorant of the teachings of any prophet. ...Every person, irrespective of whether he is a Christian, a Jew, a Muslim, a Buddhist, a Hindu, an atheist or an agnostic, knows that defrauding others is wrong. He defrauds others not due to any misconception about the “goodness” or the “badness” of defrauding others, but to gain some immediate and quick material gains from such an act. The same is the case of all other basic moral values. The excuse of ignorance, in the case of these basic moral and ethical values, shall therefore not save an individual from punishment on the Day of Judgment, as, in reality, there has never been ignorance in this sphere.⁵

This view, that we all know intuitively what is right and wrong, good and bad, is not supported by Scripture. Whatever moral knowledge humans had in the beginning has been corrupted by the influence of our fallen nature. This is why we need the special revelation of God to teach us the truth about God's moral will and the example of Christ to illustrate it in practice. Islam teaches that the Qur'an only reminds people of the ethical values they already know. It also teaches that "the Qur'an has applied the basic ethical principles on practical life situations and has prescribed or prohibited a particular code of conduct." (Ibid) It is at this point that Islam becomes legalistic, binding people to rituals about what they can eat, what they can wear and how they must worship. In Christ there is freedom from binding ritual and the encouragement to exhibit the moral direction of God's law in ways that express love to one another in appropriate ways.

Why be ethical as a Muslim? Because the articles of Islamic faith demand it. (Ibid) Why be ethical as a Christian? Because the love of God for us that we have seen and experienced in Jesus Christ wins our love for him in return and motivates us to love one another as he taught us.

Think About It

Answer Box # 4

1. What aspects of Muslim morality do you see influencing Christians in your context?
2. What Islamic practices and values do you see as temptations to Christians in your society (if Islam is present)?

Now follows a more in-depth analysis of Islamic ethics and moral practices and their impact on Christians, especially in Africa. If Muslims are living in your context, this is especially important reading for you.

Brief Introduction to Islamic Ethics

By Moussa Bongoyok (abridged) (Translated from the French by J. Robinson)

An introduction to Muslim ethics in a course on Christian ethics, even if brief, may appear strange, but how can one speak effectively about Christian ethics to churches and believers in Africa without accounting for the religious context in which they live? The African continent is 48% Christian and 41% Muslim⁶. No contextual expression of Christian ethics may ignore Islamic ethics. This is particularly important since the Christian community is called to be distinctive through exemplary witness and conduct among its neighbors. This brief introduction is designed to assist Christians better understand Muslim ethical values in order that they might better live out their own. (...)

⁵ *Principles of Islamic Ethics - An Introduction*; by Moiz Amjad of Pakistan, 2000. <http://www.understanding-islam.com/related/text.aspx?type=article&aid=75&sscetid=2> accessed Dec 20, 2010

⁶ Patrick Johnstone et Jason Mandryk *Operation World* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001) p. 21. Ethics for Living and Leading, Version 3.0

I. Ethics in Muslim thought

(...) It is with much caution that one must speak of Islamic ethics as a distinct area of study because “the moral, civil, canonical and penal laws of Islam are not rigidly separated from one another and cannot be identified as isolated systems and disciplines”.⁷ Any approach to Islamic ethics must therefore take into account Islam as a whole.

In Islam, morality is synonymous with the law⁸. Woodberry rightly says that the ethical orientation of Islamic law (shari‘ah) can be seen in the following five categories: obligatory, recommended, indifferent, reprehensible and forbidden⁹. Muslim law embraces all aspects of the life of Muslims, individually and communally, privately and publicly. It touches areas that are religious, social, military, marital, political, economic, hygienic, even including dress, in short, all the details of daily life. Thus, in Islam, ethics occupies a much larger place than in Christianity.

II. The importance of ethics in the light of contemporary events

The world in which we live is comparable to an airplane traveling through a zone of strong turbulence. In reality, Islamic terrorism is at the heart of international events and is discussed not only in the great western capitals but also in the very small villages of the Mandaras mountains in the far north of Cameroon. Osama Bin Laden and those who are closely or loosely associated with him have become heroes for many of the world’s Muslims, even for moderate Muslims. This phenomenon has attracted the attention not only of the authorities but also of men and women concerned about moral questions because ethics seems to be at the heart of the Islamic battle. In the eyes of the principal radical Muslim theologians, the Islamic battle is a war unleashed against evil. It is revealing that the “Christian” West is perceived as the great vehicle of the degradation of morals, and the United States is called “the Great Satan”.

The invasion of the media, of western culture and ideologies that highlight sex, homosexuality, violence, alcoholism, materialism and similar evils, is perceived as a serious threat by many Muslim groups. Western supremacy in the world evidenced by globalization and its corollaries of pride and disdain for other cultures further complicates the situation. How can this be remedied? An answer requires a multidisciplinary approach and involves an education of people in Islamic ethics so that this will be taken into account in relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims. Such an answer must include an objective outline of Islam in all of its diversity. (...)

III. Some characteristic traits of Islamic ethics

One could devote a whole book to characteristic traits of Islamic ethics, but we will limit ourselves here to raising a few that, in our view, merit special attention, given the basic orientation of this course.

First, it is helpful to realize that beyond some internal dissimilarities, Islamic ethics are based primarily on the prescriptions of the Qur’an and of the Muslim tradition (sunna). In cases where the Qur’an and the tradition diverge, the Qur’an takes precedence. So, in spite of differences of viewpoint, of interpretation or of sources attributed directly or indirectly to Muhammad, Muslim theologians try to harmonize their teaching with these two sources. In matters of conduct, Muhammad is the model that Muslims follow.

Another important characteristic of Islamic ethics is connected with the notion of sin. Following L. Lovonian, Bousquet affirms that “sin for Muslims is first of all the breaking of a ritualistic prohibition and beyond that a revolt against Allah through unfaithfulness; it is not moral impurity”¹⁰. So, it is clear why the Christian notion of original sin is foreign to Islam because, in Muslim thought, the sin of Adam did not affect humanity. It is useful also to realize that in Islam there exist two types of sin, the minor and the major. The Qur’an declares¹¹, for example, “If you avoid the major sins which are forbidden, We will wipe out the minor sins from your account, and We will admit you to an honorable place (Paradise).” (Surah 4:31)¹² Though the minor sins are inherent in human nature and therefore without major consequence for the eternal destiny of the believer, the major sins merit special attention. The Muslim who does not repent of a major sin must pay the penalty. Though specialists on Islam don’t agree on their number, the seventeen following sins are considered to be the major sins: unbelief, the continued commission of minor sins, loss of hope in the grace of God, considering oneself protected from the wrath of God, false witness, false accusation of a Muslim in respect to adultery, false oaths, sorcery, consumption of alcohol, taking

⁷ Muhammad Umaruddin *The Ethical philosophy of Ghazzali* Lahore : Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1970) p. 52 (notre traduction).

⁸ Cf. F : Ulrich *Die Vorherbestimmungslehre im Islam*, Thèse, Théologie, Heidelberg, 1912, pp. 128-129 cité par Georges-Henri Bousquet *L'éthique sexuelle de l'islam* (Paris : Desclée de Brouwer, 1990).p. 18

⁹ J. Dudley Woodberry “Introduction to Islam” MR 550, class syllabus /Pasadena CA: Fuller Theological Seminary, School of World Mission p. 141.

¹⁰ BOUSQUET p. 18.

¹¹ The Qur’anic translation that we are using for citing Qur’anic verses [in French] is that of Muhammad K. Daher *Le Coran* (Beyrouth : Editions Al-Birūni, 1997).

¹² Cf Sourate 53:32.

the goods of orphans, exacting excessive interest, adultery, crime against nature, stealing, murder, flight from battle in the face of enemy infidels and disobedience to parents.¹³

Though these are major sins, they can be pardoned. The only unpardonable sin according to Muslim doctrine is the *shirk*, the association of other divinities with God. Allah never pardons polytheists.¹⁴

Islamic ethics takes age into account. So, in Islam, even if children are encouraged to practice religion, only those who have reached the age of puberty are required to observe the commandments. A child does not have moral obligations toward God.¹⁵

Formalism and legalism also characterize Islamic ethics. In reading the writings of the specialists, one can easily conclude that the outstanding characteristic of Muslim ethics is legalism. Bergstässer and Schacht summarize this very well when they write that the law is the "veritable epitome of the Islamic spirit, the most decisive expression of Islamic thought, the essential core of Islam."¹⁶ The Muslim, man or woman, is by definition a person submitted to Allah. Allah is the absolute Master, and the believer, man or woman, is his slave. In this context, Muslims owe him total submission. One does what is good because Allah orders it, or one avoids evil because Allah forbids it. Here in this world, as in the next, Allah punishes the one who breaks his commandments and rewards the one who observes them. Al-Narâqî writes on this subject:

Man's moral virtue wins for himself eternal Happiness, while moral corruption leads him to eternal unhappiness. That's why man must purify himself of all the vile traits of his character and adorn his soul with moral and ethical virtue.¹⁷

Kevin contends that the central argument of the Qur'an concerning human moral obligation is "gratitude toward the benefactor."¹⁸ He bases his arguments on verses 5-7 of Surah 39. However, this is not apparent in real life because the fear of divine punishment seems to be the determining factor in Muslim conduct.

One of the consequences of legalism in Islamic ethics is its anti-utilitarianism. Many specialists have observed that, in great measure, there is a gap between theoretical moral theology and social reality. The personal or social benefits of obeying the law of Allah are not a central preoccupation of the Muslim. What counts above all is to conform to the will of Allah.

In Islamic ethics, duties toward non-Muslims are limited because one's neighbor is first of all the Muslim. The Muslim worldview includes a clear distinction between the Muslim and non-Muslim community. The world is divided into two camps, the *dâr al-islâm* (the territory of Islam) that is made up of the Muslim community (*ummah*) and the *dâr al-harb* (territory of war) that includes all those who do not practice Islam. According to this logic non-Muslims do not have to be treated with the same consideration as Muslims. The people of the book, mainly Jews and Christians¹⁹, are sometimes admired. (cf. Surah 3:113-114) Muslims are even called to respect them (cf. Surah 29:46), and they benefit from having a special status in the eyes of God (cf. Surah 2:62). Even so, they remain no less outside the Muslim community. Muslims are not to be friends with Jews and Christians (cf. Surah 5:51) but to fight against them until they submit (Surah 9:29). According to the celebrated Muslim commentator, Ibn Kathîr, even if they submit they must never be honored above Muslims because they are despicable, disgraced and base.²⁰ At the same time, it is worth noting that many Muslims work for dialogue, peace and harmonious cohabitation with believers of other religions. That deserves congratulation and encouragement. In sub-Saharan Africa one often finds Muslims, Christians and followers of traditional religion in the same family. They maintain fraternal relations in spite of religious differences.

We cannot pass over in silence the idea that actions are justified by their intentions because this notion also characterizes Islamic ethics. The fact that acts are judged by their motivations creates certain difficulties at the practical level.

We emphasize also that in Islam the one who is in a position of power seems to be granted a special ethical status. In reality, anarchy is more to be feared than the evil committed by those in authority. The evil of the one in supreme authority is moderated by his concern for order, but anarchy is perceived as the worst of evils²¹.

¹³ Thomas Patrick Hughes *Dictionary of Islam* (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1994) p. 594.

¹⁴ For more traditions relative to major sins, read *Mishkât-Ul- Masâbih Vol : I* trad. 'Abdul Hameed Sidiqqûi (New Delhi : Kitab Bhavan , 1990 ; 3rd edition) pp. 33-40.

¹⁵ Cf. Bousquet p. 20.

¹⁶ Bergsträssers Grundzüge édité par Schacht, cité par H. A. R. Gibb *Mohammedanism : An Historical Survey* (London : Oxford University, 1961) p. 106.

¹⁷ Mohammad Mahdi ibn Abu Tharr al-Narâqî *L'éthique musulmane* (Montréal : Clé du savoir, 1999 ; trad. Abbas Ahmad al-Bostani) p. 8 (version posted on the site www.bostani.com/livres/naraqî.htm accédé le 19-11-2004)

¹⁸ A Kevin "Ethic" in Jane Dammon McAuliffe *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ân* Vol. II (Leiden: Brill, 2002) p. 55.

¹⁹ The Qur'anic notion of **ahl al-kitâb** (people of the book) is not limited only to Christians and Jews but also extends equally to Zoroastrians and to Sabeans.

²⁰ *Tafsir Ibn Kathir (abridged)* Vol 4 (Riyadh : Darussalam, 2000; abridged under the supervision of Sheikh Safiur-Rahman Al-Mubarakpuri) p. 406.

²¹ Cf. Bousquet p. 32.

Finally, it is important to raise the notion of virtue. In Islamic ethics, virtue is defined in the framework of obedience to the will of God and of the pursuit of eternal happiness. That is why Donaldson does not hesitate to see this as hedonism.²² However, a serious examination of the principal Muslim virtues shows that one cannot make such a judgment so simply. For example, al Narâqî writes, "These are the moral virtues: Wisdom, Courage, Chastity and Justice. The negative qualities opposed to these virtues are: ignorance, cowardice, lust, injustice and tyranny."²³ These four cardinal virtues cannot be contained in a hedonist box. The Qur'an and the Islamic tradition cite additional virtues including piety, mutual brotherly assistance, compassion, gratitude, hope, respect for elders and for parents, hospitality, sobriety, generosity, honesty, politeness, moderation, modesty, patience, humility and obedience. Certain Muslim works, such as al-Ghāzālî, offer excellent descriptions of virtues encouraged by Islam.

Until now we have not made reference to sexual ethics. This is because it deserves a more detailed treatment.

IV. Sexual Ethics in Islam

The aspects of Muslim ethics tied to sexuality deserve particular attention because of their importance. Zeghidour writes the following in his preface to the excellent book of Bosquet that treats fairly the Muslim sexual ethic: "It is not an exaggeration to say that sexuality occupies a place in Islamic doctrine as fundamental as it does in psychoanalytic theory."²⁴ Such a remark seems a bit exaggerated, but it is evident that many Qur'anic verses and entire chapters of the hadith (narrations of the life of Muhammad and the things approved by him) deal with sexual ethics. In Africa, the sexual ethics of Islam constitute one of the main areas of Islamic influence on Christians who live in Muslim contexts. One reason for this is that Muslim conjugal life is generally much closer to African traditional practices than it is to the practices taught by Christianity. In reality, Christian ethics is sometimes more influenced by western culture than by biblical teachings.

The scope of this study does not permit us to fully treat this subject. For that, we recommend reading the work mentioned above (Georges-Henri Bousquet *L'éthique sexuelle de l'islam* [Paris : Desclée de Brouwer, 1990]). However, we note that in Islam marriage is strongly recommended, even obligatory for those able to marry. "Marry the unmarried people among you and the good people among your slaves, men and women..." orders the Qur'an in Surah 24:32. The Muslim tradition strongly accents this idea by reporting, among other references, the declaration of Muhammad: "O young people! Whoever among you is capable of marrying should do it, and whoever is not capable of it should fast, because fasting reduces sexual drive."²⁵ As this text reveals, the sexual dimension is at the heart of Muslim marriage.²⁶ The Muslim may legally marry up to four wives because it is written in the Qur'an: "...It is permitted to marry two, three or four wives who please you, but if you are afraid of not treating them justly, then one only or some of the slaves whom you own." (Surah 4:3) Certain sources speak of the possibility that a Muslim may have concubines in addition to his legitimate wives.²⁷ The Shi'ites also accept temporary (mut'a) marriage as an acceptable practice. The marriage of pleasure may last one or several nights and automatically terminates at the end of the period agreed upon at the beginning. One day a Muslim transporter of merchandise between two African countries assured me that he practiced temporary marriage during his travels. He did not see anything wrong with that, though he already had four legal wives in his household.

In sexual matters, the man has more rights than the wife. This is evident, among other places, in Surah 4:34. In heaven, virgin women are part of the reward of the faithful. (Surah 2:25)

It should also be noted that in Islam "zina" (fornication, adultery and every blamable sexual act) is strongly condemned. (Surah 4:15-16; 24:2) Every physical appearance and any promiscuity that stirs up sexual appetites are also condemned. This is why clothing, especially of the women (Surah 24:30-31), and encounters of persons of the opposite sex are strictly regulated.

Homosexuality is also condemned by Islam. The Qur'an is quite clear about this: "Do you commit carnal acts with the males of this world? Do you abandon the wives that the Lord created for you? You are but transgressors." (Surah 26:165-166) Although the text here is directed explicitly toward men, Muslim theologians are generally of the opinion that the same condemnation applies to lesbianism.

Certainly sexual ethics is an area in which African traditions and Islamic values intersect, but the encounter between Islam and African religions goes even farther than that.

²² Cf. Dwight M. Donaldson *Studies in Muslim Ethics* (London: SPCK, 1953) p. 269.

²³ Al Narâqî p. 13.

²⁴ Slimane Zeghidour in Bousquet p. IV.

²⁵ *Sahih al-Bukhari: Arabic-English* Vol. VII (Medina: Dar Ahya Us-Sunnah, 1297 A.H. trad. Muhammad Muhsin Khan) p.3. (notre traduction)

²⁶ In Arabic, the word translated by marriage is *nikâh'* that literally means « copulation ».

²⁷ Cf. Bousquet pp. 109-110.

V. Islamic Ethics in Africa: Between Conservatism and Adaptation to the Context

Islam has had a great impact on African traditions, but the reverse is not less true. Alili saw that clearly when he wrote:

The brotherhood became the instrument of an extraordinary expansion of Islam in black Africa, in Indonesia, in India, in central Asia, in the Caucuses and in the Balkans. This islamization occurred through the phenomenon of inculturation, that is, the more or less radical awareness and transformation of the dogma and practices of Islam by the cultures that received the new religion.²⁸

Kasene stresses the same idea, affirming that regardless of their religion the African man or woman shares the sense of belonging and the sense of the life of their community. While recognizing the disturbing effect of cultural influences from east and west he notes that:

In terms of morality, the African traditions have much to offer. The African value of solidarity with its accent on mutual assistance, respect for older persons and consideration for the youngest, generosity, honesty, hospitality, particular attention to the transmission and preservation of life, the sacredness of sex, the importance of commitment to marriage and family life, regard for the poor, for orphans, widows and foreigners, and the great value attached to infants, constitutes a good base for morality.²⁹

In Africa, many Muslims revert to practices that are foreign to Qur'anic prescriptions and Muslim tradition. Certain of them spring from African religions. To be more precise, here are a few examples:

- Among the Hausa the [Muslim] "malam" and the [traditional] "feticher" are both useful for societal balance.³⁰
- Many Muslims of northern Cameroon give money to their parents who have remained pagan so that they can engage in worship of the ancestors in their name for the purpose of attracting their blessings and repelling evil spells.
- The nomadic Peulhs continue to use certain incantations and to observe certain taboos that date from the pre-Islamic period.
- The Sereres worship the Pangol (intermediate spirits between God and humans).³¹

In his article "Church Planting Among Folk Muslims," Richard D. Love observed that the following elements characterize popular Islam: spirits, demons, blessings, maledictions, healing and sorcery. He found among other things that formal Islam is cognitive, institutional, oriented toward truth, legalistic and dependent on the Qur'an and the sacred traditions. By contrast, popular Islam is sentimental, mystical and preoccupied much more with daily life and its multiple needs such as health and prosperity, depending mainly on supernatural powers and spiritual revelation.³²

This reality is a great factor in the expansion of Islam among the followers of African religions because they find the Muslim religious life much less demanding than Christianity that tends toward a break with ancestral customs and generally condemns syncretism. This observation is especially important for Protestantism which, in several ways, is much more rigorous. Muslim syncretism is understood by Muslims themselves and is condemned by the preaching and teaching of radical Muslim groups and preachers influenced by Wahhabism and similar movements.

VI. The Influence of Muslim Ethics on Christians in Africa

As we have observed above, Muslims and non-Muslims live in symbiotic relationships in many families of Africa, especially south of the Sahara. Even if they are not of the same family, the same clan or the same ethnic group, the good neighborly relations and ties of solidarity result in the sharing of the great events of life. People rejoice together at the birth of an infant and when someone experiences social promotion, success or happy events. During Christmas celebrations it is not unusual to find Muslims buying new outfits for their wives and children and slaughtering a sheep or a goat for them if they don't join Christians directly during the festivities. Christians also share in the joy of Muslims during the feast of the end of Ramadan (Īd al Fitr) and that of the sacrifice (Īd al Adhā). They visit one another and weep together in cases of sickness, of death, of fires and of various calamities. The neighbor is first of all a member of the community before being a Muslim, a Christian or a follower of another religion. All these encounters favor ties of unity and friendship among diverse religious communities and deserve to be encouraged. However, if Christians are called to maintain excellent human relations with neighbors without any distinction and to love them with the love of Christ, they must nevertheless remain vigilant in

²⁸ Rochdy Alili *Qu'est-ce que l'islam ?* (Paris : La découverte, 2000) p. 229.

²⁹ Peter Kasene *Religious Ethics in Africa* (Kampala : Fountain Publishers, 1998) p. 6 (our translation).

³⁰ J.C Froelich *Les musulmans d'Afrique Noire* (Paris : Editions de l'Orante, 1962). 104.

³¹ Vincent Monteil *L'Islam Noir* (Paris : Seuil, 1971) P. 29.

³² Richard Love « Church Planting Among Folk Muslim » in *International Journal of Frontier Mission* Vol 11: 2 avril 1994 p. 88.

order not to copy the habits that conflict with Christian ethics. We will mention three examples of this among many others.

First, there is the great influence of the legalistic character of Muslim ethics on Christians who live in heavily islamized contexts. Now, it is important to avoid the trap of legalism. Contrary to the Islamic tendency, Christian ethics are not simply a matter of law. As Ulrich has well noted, other factors such as faith and love must be taken into account.³³ Love for the Lord and for one's neighbor transcends legal requirements. The Christian obeys the law but in complete liberty and in gratitude toward his or her Lord. The letter to the Galatians treats this issue in depth.

A second example touches marital life. The husband must treat his wife as a partner equal to himself, must live a conjugal life in reciprocal love and fidelity and must achieve mutual understanding with her in intimate areas. Marriage is one of the domains in which the Christian community can stand out distinctively. The question of monogamy is also important here because polygamy is a great temptation for Christians, especially when they are confronted with the problem of sterility. Nevertheless, they must resist falling into this trap and remain faithful to biblical teachings.

A last example relates to occult practices. A very large number of African Muslims do not hesitate to use talismans and occult practices in order to succeed in life, to protect themselves against the influence of the evil eye, to avoid danger, to disarm visible or invisible enemies, to attract the favors of a girl or a boy, to heal a stubborn malady and to dispel sorcerers, to cite only a few examples. Without necessarily having bad intentions, certain of them recommend to Christians that they act in the same way, offering concrete examples of where occultism has given the anticipated results. Unfortunately, many Christians succumb to the temptation to give themselves to such practices. Sometimes, they take the initiative themselves to seek the services of Muslim marabouts with all the consequences that this has for their own spiritual life and for the testimony of the Christian community to which they belong. Christian spiritual leaders are responsible to teach about sorcery and occult practices while underlining the protective power of the Lord and the privileges of those who belong to him. The Christian community is also called to surround and effectively support the faithful who have endured testing or have been weakened by various existential problems.

Conclusion

Islamic ethics present similarities with Christian ethics, but they differ by their all-encompassing character and by many aspects of their specific teachings. In the African context, in addition to the teachings of the great schools of Islamic law, Muslim ethics have been impacted by the influence of African traditional customs. Having undergone this local influence, they in turn influence the Christian community in one way or another.

So, the importance of understanding morality within Islam in an African context is evident. It enables a better understanding of Muslim neighbors and their moral convictions in order to avoid offending them in these areas and to preserve good neighborly relations. It permits Christians to better distinguish the ethical similarities and differences so that they can see the implications for their own actions. It also makes it possible to build bridges that encourage a harmonious community life which is an ideal framework for positive Christian witness. In all of this, ethics offers a genuine field of collaboration between Christians and Muslims in an era when the world seems to favor pornography, homosexuality, abortion, euthanasia, human cloning and similar vices. Medical ethics and environmental ethics³⁴ are also excellent fields for common action. God desires that the followers of different religions be able to live together.

Without denying their own ethical convictions and without remaining silent concerning the Good News of salvation freely offered in Jesus Christ, Christians have a duty to respect and love Muslims. They also have a divine responsibility to distinguish themselves by exemplary conduct as salt of the earth and light of the world.

Think About It

Answer Box # 5

Bongyok observes that Islam in Africa has adapted to many of the moral values of traditional African societies. At what points have you felt this Muslim reinforcement of traditional practices to pose ethical problems for Christians?

³³ Cf : Ulrich Ibid.

³⁴ Richard C. Foltz et al. (ed.) *Islam and Ecology* (Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 2003) is an excellent book on Muslim environmental ethics.

III. Modern Secular Worldview

Regardless of where we live in today's world, we cannot escape the impact of western post-Christian values and life styles. They impact us through schools, popular music, movies, radio, television and the internet. These values have become part of an international culture that is influencing the lives of young people especially, but older folk as well. It is important that we attempt to understand these forces that are changing the ethical form and fabric of our societies.

What follows here is first a brief outline of modern secularism. A longer reading follows on postmodernism. The philosophies exposed here are not going to disappear soon. They have already deeply infected western nations and are rapidly penetrating Africa, Asia and Latin America. It appears that they will become increasingly powerful as time passes, challenging the moral values of Christians in general and Christian leaders in particular.

Can Christians successfully resist the attack of these modern philosophies with their negative ethical outcomes? Yes, but Christians and their leaders will need to be informed, alert, and active, understanding the nature of the enemy, and taking up appropriate weapons to stand fast in God's truth and in righteousness as God defines it. (Ephesians 6:14)

There are two worldviews that have dominated western thinking in the twentieth century and that continue to influence the rest of the world. The first may be called *modernism* or *secular humanism*.³⁵

This worldview was born in the 17th and 18th centuries during the age of reason when "... man was competent, by his own reason and the evidence provided by his senses, to discover his own truth."³⁶ Here are its basic beliefs:

1. Matter exists and is all there is.
2. The universe is a closed system, without supernatural influence, operating by cause and effect.
3. Every aspect of a person can be explained in terms of biochemistry.
4. Death is the end of personal existence.
5. History has no overarching purpose.
6. Ethics and morals are humanly determined.
7. The application of reason to reality will lead to the discovery of universal principles.

A second worldview can be called *postmodernism* and represents a reaction against modernism's neglect of the moral and spiritual dimensions of life. Here are some of postmodernism's characteristics:

1. The human mind does not have the ability to discover truth; it creates truth internally and organizes reality according to the categories it creates.
2. Language consists only of metaphors. It cannot communicate truth about reality. A piece of literature means only what the interpreter wants it to mean.
3. Perspectivism: There is no such thing as absolute truth. Rather, truth is just a matter of perspective. There are only truths for a certain sort of creature or a certain society. There is no truth as such.
4. Relativistic pluralism: Each person's perspective differs because their understanding is determined by their social contexts. Therefore, no ultimate judgments can be made about the legitimacy of each perspective.
5. Where modernism sought over-arching theories that would tie the universe together in a coherent manner, postmodernism sees the universe as fragmented, disconnected and chaotic.

How does biblical Christianity differ from these contemporary worldviews? Here are beliefs held by evangelical Christians in contrast to these worldviews:

1. In addition to the material world there is a spiritual world whose reality is even greater than the physical universe.
2. The universe is an open system. It operates under the supervision of God, the creator and sustainer of the universe.
3. Human beings are much more than biological organisms. They have eternal souls.
4. Every person will spend an eternity either in heaven or hell.
5. History can only be understood from the perspective of God's plans and purposes being fulfilled.
6. Ethics and morals are established by God.
7. Relationship with Jesus Christ leads to discovery of truth and universal principles established by God.³⁷

³⁵ Gary Jung, *A Christian Worldview*, 2003.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

Think About It

Answer Box # 6

1. What ethical guidance do modern and postmodern, secular worldviews offer?
2. How does a Christian worldview differ on this point?

African traditional religion, Islam, and modern secularism each impact a Christian worldview and Christian ethics in various ways. These summaries of alternative worldviews and ethics are offered with the hope that they may enable Christians to more clearly understand the religious and cultural pressures that make living as a faithful follower of Jesus in today's world such a tremendous challenge.

With an understanding of these alternate worldviews, Christians should be better prepared to address the moral and spiritual issues that will enable them to make better ethical decisions and to live the life in Christ that God desires for them.

In the following reading please give special attention to the highlighted parts of the text. They touch on issues of worldview and postmodern ethics that Christian leaders need to think about seriously.

IV. A Postmodern Worldview

By Pascal Blaise Beboua and Moussa Bongoyok

A. Description of Postmodernism in the West and its implications for the Western church

Before bringing an African perspective to the reflection on the phenomenon of postmodernism, we think that it is appropriate to describe it as it manifests itself in the West, where it has its roots. Although it is difficult to define the term *postmodernism*, it is good to keep in mind its key characteristics.

1. The Rejection of the Enlightenment Philosophy

In his book entitled *A Primer on Postmodernism*³⁸, Stanley J. Grenz brilliantly exposes the intellectual orientation of postmodernism. For him, from an intellectual standpoint this term refers to the rejection of the modern mind-set that was symbolized by the "*enlightenment project*". As Grenz explains it, for the postmodern thinkers, the epistemological assumptions about the certainty, the objectivity and the goodness of knowledge that constituted the foundation of the enlightenment philosophy can no longer be followed. On the contrary, they argue that instead of living in an objectivist world we are simply in a constructionist outlook. All attempts to build a systematic all-encompassing discourse of reality must be suspiciously considered as a meta-narrative that needs to be deconstructed.

Also examining postmodernism, Chuck Smith very accurately describes it as a shift from reason to experience. Human reason is no longer the center of answers to life's questions, and the scientific method is no longer the only way to approach a problem. Even history is not trusted by postmodernists because, from their perspective, it fails to tell the truth. They also deny the possibility of objective study and push their thinking to the point that even the existence of absolute truth is rejected. Therefore, there is no religious, cultural or general absolute. Furthermore, there is no hope of knowing reality. Such a philosophy leads to skepticism, pessimism, relativism and a suspicious outlook on religions, especially those claiming to be divinely revealed and truth revealing.

2. A Profound Cultural Shift

However, postmodernism is more than just a philosophical conception. Even when Grenz writes that "postmodernism is above all an intellectual outlook," he himself describes it very well as "a

³⁸ Eerdmans, 1996.

phenomenon in popular culture". In fact, the postmodern phenomenon can be depicted as a tremendous shift taking place in the western society. Smith calls it a "culture quake" characterized by multiculturalism, disconnectedness and leveling of hierarchies, and for him it is "the most radical cultural transformation of the last three or four centuries" in the western world. The speed of change that led Alvin Toffler to create the expression of the "future shock" is unbelievably transforming the society. The generation gap that has become more and more profound between those who can be considered as the "cultural quake victims" and the former generations, obviously points to a new era. The new trends in the religious sphere, combined with the strong desire for authenticity in life and relationship that characterize the new generation, definitely show that a different mood is set up.

All these changes brought by postmodern thought affect television, art, politics and law, culture, religion and all other aspects of societal apparatus. In such a context, the traditional values promoted by the church and the uniqueness of the message it preaches are undermined. For example, in postmodern terms, Jesus is no longer the Way; he is only one way among others. He is no longer the Truth but one aspect of the truth. That's why the postmodern context is leading the western society to move towards a neo-pagan culture characterized by Satanism, religious pluralism and new challenges.

In the introduction to his book, Robert Wuthnow presents a brilliant summary of the institutional, ethical, doctrinal, political and cultural challenges. The focus of this paper doesn't allow us to cover this entire vast domain. For this reason, we have preferred to focus on aspects that are meaningful for our ministry context in Cameroon.

3. A Powerful Impact on the Church

Though the United States of America is more religious than any other country in the western world, it is also impacted by postmodernism. The decline of mainline denominations documented and commented by Professor Eddie Gibbs is eloquent. We have observed churches that are struggling just to keep the doors open. For example, one of the churches we attend had about three hundred members in the past, but now it has only twenty members among whom the vast majority is more than seventy years of age. There is no youth program and apparently no program to reach out to them.

The Church grows more by transfer or recycling than conversion; whereas, in Africa it is the opposite. The American society assigns no position to church, but in Africa the church plays a key role even on political and social scenes. Inside the churches, members are so busy and time-oriented that they do not have time for church meetings during the week, apart from Sunday morning, and even less for commitment to a special activity in the church.

The myth that the western culture is a Christian culture is shaken by what Darell L. Guder calls "the profound tensions in the relationship between western Christianity and its European forms". People are seeking alternative explanations because they no longer trust previous certainties.

The portrait of the new teen generation in the United States, sketched by Richard R. Dunn and Mark H. Senter III, may seem too pessimistic, but from our point of view, it is not far from the reality. For them, the new teens are impacted by violence, especially through the influence of television, parental absence and high rate of divorce, job stress and various other societal or personal struggles. It is obvious that postmodern detachment from traditional spiritual values does not facilitate life for the younger generation.

During group work discussions, many classmates shared their concern about the decline they have observed in their local churches for various reasons, among which are leadership issues, weaknesses in the area of evangelism and discipleship and lack of adequate strategy to reach out to the younger generation. Only one member of our discussion group at class said that his church is growing very fast, and the growth is due to the fact that two churches merged and the new pastor spent some time overseas in order to refresh himself before continuing his ministry. These are clear indications that something is going wrong.

The impact of postmodernism on the Church is obvious in the west. Is it also the case in Cameroon? The next part will deal with this question.

B. The impact of postmodernism on the Church in the urban areas of Cameroon

There is no society that has ever been totally transformed in such a short lapse of time as that of the African continent. In the space of less than a half century tremendous changes literally reshaped the face of that part of the world. Innovations that waited for centuries to take place, especially in the western world, brutally overflowed Africa, and brought the continent into the modern world without any transition. Situated in west Africa, Cameroon is a country that can be considered as an example of the accelerated changes the African continent has known.

1. The Context

Cameroon is a secular African country located between west and central Africa, near to the Atlantic Ocean. In fact, the geographic position of the country and the abundance of shrimp on its coast are at the origin of its name which comes from the Portuguese Camaroes (shrimps). The Portuguese were the first to discover the coast of Cameroon, on the Atlantic Ocean, in 1472. Though there are only sixteen million Cameroonians today, they speak two hundred eighty languages and belong to five hundred or more ethnic groups. For Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk, it is "Africa's most complex country". In order to facilitate communication, the vast majority of Cameroonians uses French, and a minority uses English. Both languages are official. Religiously speaking, the country guarantees religious freedom. Islam is dominant in the northern part of the country. The population is 25% Muslim, and 69% are Christians (among whom 13.5% are evangelicals, including charismatic and Pentecostal Churches). The rest of the population generally practices African "traditional" religion.

It should be noted furthermore that Cameroon is undergoing a process of urbanization. With more than a 40% rate of urbanization since the seventies, along with the huge growth of urban drift within the country, Cameroon is a portion of Africa where villages are more and more relegated to second rank. The phenomenon is so important that it led the President of the Republic to establish a minister in charge of Urban Communities in the late 1990s. Even so, there are more inhabitants in rural areas than in cities because the economy of the country relies basically on agricultural products. However, the major educational and administrative facilities are in urban areas where there is also the most significant influence of postmodernism. However, even in the villages the vision of the world has been modified. Once the village was the world; now the world looks like a village. This is particularly visible in the urban setting where people are more and more in contact with what is coming from all over the world. This justifies our choice to focus on this urban context.

2. Similarities between the West and Cameroon in respect to postmodernism

In *A Primer on Postmodernism*, Grenz speaks respectively of film, television and rock music as the foundation that have made postmodern popular culture possible, the most efficient vehicles for disseminating postmodern ethos throughout the society, and the most representative forms of postmodern culture. In the urban areas of Cameroon all these factors of the postmodern era are brought together, and in recent years we have seen a tremendous and growing impact of postmodernism on the younger generation in Cameroon.

In Cameroon there is no film industry, but almost all the films produced in the western world and especially the super-productions that come from the USA can be watched on the big screen. Titles such as "JFK," "Titanic" and "Star Trek: The New Generation" are not strange for many among the young generation of those living in Douala, Yaoundé, Bafoussam, and even Garoua and Maroua.

The national television, relayed by TV cables and videos, is also a window through which postmodernism is infiltrating pop culture in Cameroon. The influence is still more subtle than in the West but can sometimes be just as aggressive. One of the most watched TV programs in Yaoundé and Douala these recent months is not national broadcasting but *Ça va se savoir!* (It will be revealed!), a program from the French RTL9 channel that is reaching Cameroon through cable. *Ça va se savoir!* is a show presenting real domestic quarrels and rows on TV. The panelists on the show are people who are related in life and come to the panel to tell each other things they would not have dared to tell elsewhere. You can watch on *Ça va se savoir!* a mother and daughter quarreling because of a common boyfriend, a husband revealing publicly to his wife his love for a new girlfriend, a teenager saying bad words to his father for not allowing him to have sex at home with whomever he wants, and others things like that. This program runs counter to what Africans generally believe, but it does not prevent *Ça va se savoir!* from having a tremendous attraction on people and especially on teenagers. Because we know the rampant desire to imitate western youth in every facet, we can imagine the kind of impact this can have on the way the younger generation in the urban areas of Cameroon thinks or behaves.

For the Church in Cameroon, all these changes have made a world totally different from the one that existed when the missionaries first came with the Gospel. The new social, cultural, intellectual and spiritual climate must be taken into account. Today the church has to deal with a generation of young people and teenagers that constitutes the major part of the whole population of the country as well as the church population. It is a generation of young people whose clothing styles are not different from what you can see in Paris or in Los Angeles, and whose mindset is being shaped not by what is said in the village or from their parents but by what they watch on TV and movies, hear on the radio, learn from the internet, and study at school from teachers who have been trained under the influence of western books and teachers.

That makes the new generation more exacting, more demanding and more critical, even in spiritual matters. They tend to reject everything that seems old-fashioned and are longing for a Christianity which will be socially present, intellectually relevant and spiritually authentic. Many abandon churches for religious sects because they think their social level of life will be improved, their philosophical quest will be satisfied and spiritually they will have authentic and deep level experiences. That is why religious sects with philosophical and esoteric backgrounds such as Rosicrucianism and Freemasonry are gaining

success especially among the students in universities. The consequences are serious because the church leaders seem to ignore the situation and are not prepared to handle the new currents. For example, most of them do not even know that the internet exists while the younger generation surfs the web day and night, and through the web, is connected to the same trends that shape the way of life in the western world.

Another aspect that can be viewed as a similarity between the west (especially the American context) and Cameroon in respect to postmodernism is the growing tendency toward redistribution of people in churches. The phenomenon of the redistribution of church-going people that can be observed in North America is not completely absent in Cameroon. It is particularly apparent among the Pentecostal churches that, in several contexts, recruit a large portion of their members from established Catholic and Protestant churches. We have observed this in cities like Maroua and Yaoundé. Yet, in the midst of all these transformations of the cultural urban setting of Cameroon, which reflect to a certain extent the new era of postmodernism in the western civilization, we can still easily recognize the limits of the influence of the postmodernism phenomenon. This is because the Cameroonian urban setting is historically, culturally, religiously and sociologically different from the context in which the western civilization has seen the postmodern mindset become rooted.

3. Differences between the West and Cameroon in respect to postmodernism

Historically speaking, what is happening in the urban area of Cameroon is not a shift from the modern to the postmodern era as in the west but a move from the traditional to the contemporary world.

Culturally, the transformations that are taking place in Cameroon are not, as is the case in the West, the result of the rejection of the past and of a certain tradition of culture (enlightenment project with the end of truth, meta-narratives and the whole tradition of modern philosophy). They are just the result of the modernization of the country. Despite all the changes, there is still in Cameroon a powerful attraction to the past and traditions. This is proved by the phenomenon of cultural revival that has been observed since the nineties in almost all the tribes. Today there are growing numbers of cultural and ethnic associations along with the creation of committees for the development of villages. What appears clear is that the religious and cultural agenda of those committees is more dominant than the development purpose.

For example, in the far north of Cameroon, the Guiziga were heavily influenced by Islam and their culture to the point that it was hard to differentiate them from Muslim culture. Even the usage of their language was less and less frequent. In their own villages, Fulfulde was the dominant language, and the names given to the children were Muslim names. But, since the 1990s, the Cultural Association of Guiziga came into existence and, through the activities of that association, an important number of Guiziga people are coming back to the traditional religious and cultural values. Such a context shows clearly that the tribal narratives continue to shape the worldview of many, and what Byang Kato has called "the heart of the culture" is still beating in the twenty-first century in Cameroon. Even local churches are not spared from the impact of the traditional cultures, and the truth that "every church reflects a culture" is revealed by strong tribal presence in Cameroon, more than in the west.

Religiously, the urban context in Cameroon also has its specificities. The difference with the western world, even when one considers the popularity of religion in the United States of America, is that in Cameroon churches are growing, and the other religions like Islam or ancestral and tribal beliefs are also attracting a lot of young people. In the Islamic circles, for example, there is a sort of revival going on. The Muslims become more and more devout in their religious activities with a growing impact of Islamic Fundamentalism. During the mid 1990s, the movement "*Jeunesse Islamique*" (Muslim Youth) was founded, and for the first time they started teaching the Koran to young Muslims in public schools (only Christians were involved in such activities before). They also started special radio and television programs to preach the doctrine of Islam and answer questions about the Muslim faith. They are also organizing various religious, cultural and social activities that mobilize a lot of young Muslims.

Fortunately, the attraction of the youth to religious activities is also obvious among the Evangelicals and visible in other Christian churches as well. We have experienced this during our pastoral ministries in an urban context. The younger generation is still attracted by the church and very active. Though the pressure of professional life is visible in the urban context, the population is not as time-oriented as it is here in the western world. Christians attend churches more regularly and are involved in church activities when their leaders give them the opportunity to do so. The calling for church ministry is still strong. The Church usually needs to limit the number of students to be trained in Bible or theological seminaries because there is not enough money to cover the expenses related to their studies. Churches are growing very fast, and new churches are planted every year. In the last seven years, for example, more than 150 new churches were planted in the northern part of Cameroon.

Generally speaking, churches grow by conversion. The population is very open to the message of the Gospel, and members come basically from an African religion background. This confirms the comparison established by Gifford between the recent statistics and Barrett's figures for the mid-1980s where we notice that about a half of traditionalists became Christians. There are also more and more

Muslim converts, and this is explained not only by the fact that Germans, French and British discouraged Christian missions in the northern part of Cameroon for socio-political reasons, but also because of the following history.

The north was dominated politically but not numerically by the Fulbe Muslims who had invaded part of the north in the nineteenth century. Their control was strengthened by the colonial administration and then by Ahidjo. Under him there was even discrimination against the Kirdis (“pagans” from the Islamic viewpoint) and pressures on them to convert. There was even some persecution of the churches. All this changed after Biya’s accession to the presidency, especially after the suppression of an attempted coup in 1984 by basically northern (and Fulbe-officered) presidential guard. The Fulbe have had their power curtailed considerably, and the churches now enjoy freedom to evangelize in the north.

Sociologically there is a significant difference between Cameroon and the western world. If in the United States of America, for example, the population is divided into the Builders, Silent, Boomers, Gen X and Gen Y generations, that generational analysis is not applicable to Cameroon. The description by Donald E. Miller and Arpi Misha Miller of GenXers as the rootless and lonely generation of computer experts does not apply to Cameroonians born between 1961 and 1981. This is not true at all in our context. We can say this with confidence because both of us were born during that period. In our country we speak in terms of younger and older generation. The younger generation is largely educated and literate, especially in the cities. The older generation has less formal education and is sometimes illiterate, especially grandparents. Life expectancy being very limited (around 50 years of age), the majority of the population is under 20 years of age. In contrast to the western Churches, during ecclesial meetings, there are more children and youth than adults. For this reason the youth is not only the future of the Church but it is also its present. However, in the African environment where age is an important factor of respect, the elder generation tends to maintain key leadership positions for a very long time and sometimes until death. They do not pay attention to the constant need to put new wine into new wineskins, to underline the same point made by Peter Wagner.

The majority of church members are from an older generation. This situation has its good side: the new destructive currents of theological thought have less influence on the Church. But, honestly speaking, it does not help the Church to adequately address the needs of the younger generation and does not contribute to better spiritual growth and expansion. It causes problems, and there is sometimes an open or silent conflict between generations undermining the development of the Church. For this reason, it is urgent to train church leaders on how to pass the baton, include more youth in leadership teams and mentor the next generation without interfering.

Another difference with the west comes from the fact that there are many so-called Christians in key political and administrative positions in Cameroon, but the country is still struggling with problems like corruption, favoritism or misuses of public property to a point the population lives in a silent hopelessness. Where are the 69% who claim to be Christians? This is a serious issue. It seems that, while the western churches need to transition from being inviting churches to becoming infiltrating churches, the Cameroonian churches need to move from being “evangelistic churches” to being “impacting churches.” This takes intentional and contextual missional responses. We will elaborate more on this in the following and last part of the paper.

C. Missional responses to the impact of postmodernism in Cameroonian urban contexts

1. Facing the cultural revival

The resurgence of interest for traditional cultural and religious values is a very important opportunity for developing a contextual missiological program in order to reach the younger generation. The Church in Cameroon may have more impact on the ethnic groups if it wisely and intentionally detaches itself from western patterns of liturgy, music and ecclesial tradition in order to draw from the richness of local tradition for a more contextual liturgy, music and religious practice. In Cameroon, the cultural diversity is such that the effort of critical contextualization necessitates differences of emphasis from one ethnic group to another. Conversely, by doing so, it must not fall into the danger of tribalism or syncretism which will damage the spiritual growth of the Church.

2. Getting Trained on New Foundations

In order to succeed in its missional effort to reach out to the younger generation, the re-training or re-education of the leadership is crucial. The current leadership needs renewal both academically and in terms of ministry insights and skills for the sake of the future efficacy of the Church. As it is observed in the west, Evangelical church leaders in Cameroon were not trained for future generations. The situation is even worse because the current church leaders are largely a product of the missionaries who belong to the Builders and Silent generations. Today they are leading the churches and training other church leaders from their old books and notebooks because it is not easy to purchase new books and follow the

rapid evolution of theological debate in the western world. Even a simple and rapid survey of Bible school and seminary libraries might show how few and old are the books, and the situation is even worse for personal libraries. The titles of courses and their descriptions have also been conserved since the ministry of the first professors leading biblical training schools, and the churches led by their alumni get stuck in old paradigms.

3. Presenting Propositions along with Stories

There is an urgent need to rethink theological and consequently missiological education because a bad or inappropriate theology will produce a bad mission practice. The ideal might not be to follow the west without discernment. Rather, it is important to reflect on all the changes observed in the context; draw from the rich western theological and historical experiences; and consider, in the light of the Holy Spirit, what can be done in order to effectively reach the present and future generations for Christ. To illustrate that point let us remember that the strength of the meta-narratives cannot be overemphasized in the Cameroonian urban area. The long tradition of stories, images and symbols are still alive, but there is a need for a certain function of propositional truths in presenting the Gospel. Although we agree with Grenz when he states that "The postmodern situation requires that we embody the Gospel in a manner that is post-individualistic, post-rationalistic, post-dualistic and post-noeticentric", we think that the cognitive (propositional truth) aspect of the Gospel still has an important place in Cameroon. The growing numbers of young educated people raises in Cameroon the need for intellectually well-trained pastors and church leaders. In the Cameroon urban setting we still need to demonstrate, just as the boomers had to do it in their time, that the Christian faith is not necessarily unreasonable and that "no one need commit intellectual suicide to be a Christian".

4. Mentoring and Empowering the Young Leaders

As the Church reflects on the future, it must not neglect the present or even the past. The previous and current generations need to be trained in such a way that they will facilitate the rise and empowerment of younger generations for more prolific evangelistic and discipleship ministries in the future. The renewal of the leadership is necessary, but it is not sufficient in itself if it does not affect positively the inherited institutional patterns in such a way that the organizational structure allows enough flexibility to take into account the cultural changes and maintain the organic nature of the Church.

Both the renewal of leadership and organizational flexibility will create a favorable context for effective mentorship. Mentorship is an urgent need because the Church is growing rapidly in Cameroon, but discipleship is not following at the same rate. There are various reasons for this situation among which are the insufficient number of trained pastors, the poor intellectual level of the church leaders who are teaching more educated church members and the lack of effective discipleship models and tools. In this situation, it is really urgent to implement efficient and personal discipleship programs in order to mentor not only a spiritual elite but the whole church considering the fact that each church member has at least one spiritual gift (1 Peter 4:10) and has the responsibility to use it for the edification of the whole body of Christ.

In a reflection related to the future of the church by Ben Freudenburg and Rick Lawrence the same idea is put differently. From their perspective, the best way to reach the next generation is to equip and train fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, aunts, grandmothers, grandfathers, in short, the extended family. The rationale is that they will be able to communicate the faith with passion and clarity to the next generation. They will also be ready to infiltrate all segments of the society with the transforming message of the Gospel. In fact, this principle is not an invention of postmodern-world-conscious missionaries or scholars, though they have the merit of reminding the Church of the need of doing God's mission in such a way that it takes into account the changes in the society. This is only possible through the good conduct of the church members manifested in all the areas of their private and public life. In order to do so, Tokunboh Adeyemo's ten practical guidelines for influencing African nations with Christian values may be deepened and applied. Though he has not addressed all the key aspects of Christian involvement in African societies, he provides realistic aspects to start with and poses good ideas for further reflection.

The principle of infiltration fits into the vision of the Lord when he called his disciples to be the light and the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13-16) and to preach the Gospel to all the nations (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8). Our Lord didn't have in mind just the "spiritual elite" but all the current and future disciples as he clearly expressed in his sacerdotal prayer. (John 17:20-23).

5. Becoming a Transforming Presence for Muslims.

This biblical orientation is important for missional work in Cameroon because the freedom to evangelize the northern part of Cameroon could bear more fruit if it were done under God's guidance with appropriate and contextually friendly approaches among the youth. Even young Muslims are more open to new ideas and consequently to the Gospel in a poor context where they are also targeted by rich Islamists. If the Church does not take advantage of the liberty it has to evangelize as quickly as possible, the door may close again due to the Islamic move towards more fundamentalist aspects of the Muslim

faith. As David H. Henderson wrote, “We need to live in such a way that, if Jesus really does make a difference in our lives, people around us cannot help but see it”. It is only at that cost that the Christian community of Cameroon will become an increasingly transforming presence. Without a qualitative Christian life, the flame of zeal inherited from the first Christians is in danger of extinction. The epilogue of a book, edited by Samuel Ngewa, Mark Shaw and Tite Tienou, is entitled “African Christianity in the 21st Century”.³⁹ There we find these interesting lines: “Yet despite the signs of growth that these last years have brought, the task of building and perfecting the mega-church of Africa remains daunting”. This remark is equally true for the specific context of Cameroon.

Conclusion

Though the impact of postmodernism in Cameroon is not as frightening as is the case in western nations, it is there and may grow in the future especially in an urban milieu. An African proverb says: “If the beard of your neighbor catches fire, fetch water on your own (in order to prevent being equally burned).” This proverb reminds us to have a better understanding of what is happening to the emerging Church in the twenty-first century. It is time for us to “fetch water on the beard” of churches in Cameroon. The threat of postmodernism is not only western. Rather, it is global. The solutions may vary because of the specificities, but the key principles are the same—the church should not ignore its impact, but understand the phenomenon, respond satisfactorily to its missional challenges, and contextualize both the Christian community and the message in order to succeed in its missionary task among the current and future generations. Like Paul who was Jew among the Jews and Greek among the Greek in order to win the greatest number for Christ (1 Corinthians 9:19-23), the Church in Cameroon and elsewhere should not be afraid to be postmodern among the postmodernists in order to reach out to them. The only caution is to avoid any syncretistic approach that will harm faithfulness to the Lord and to his Holy Scriptures.

Think About It

Answer Box # 7

1. Postmodernism’s view of life without God and without moral absolutes leads to what sort of behavior in teenagers in Cameroon today according to Beboua & Bongoyok?
2. What actions do these authors propose that Christian leaders undertake in order to assist the Church to make a positive moral impact both within and outside the Church? What would you add or subtract?

³⁹ *Issues in African Christian Theology* (East African Educational Publishers, 1998).
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Think About It

In the table below are found five ideas from Mpindi's description of an African worldview. Please fill in the blank cells with phrases that reflect your understanding of a postmodern worldview and a Christian worldview.

	Mpindi's description of African worldview	A postmodern Worldview	A Christian worldview
Worldview structure	Hierarchy and harmony		
Supreme Being	Distant creator		
Mediators	Divine (spirits and ancestors) and human		
Goal of life	Community and individual well-being		
Concept of good	Utilitarian (what serves our/my interests)		