**Christian Ethics**

By Daryel Erickson

**A. What is Christian Ethics?**

1. The Dictionary defines ethics as, “a set of moral standards principles.”

a. It relates to how a person should or could live in relationship to a set of standards and/or moral convictions.

1) Ethical behavior is judged based on a standard of laws, rules or regulations associated with family values, a given culture and its traditions, people groups, religious beliefs, world view, etc.

b. Situational ethics is a particular view of ethics that holds that the morality of certain behavior is determined right or wrong by the function of choice.

1) It states that if there is a right and wrong, it is merely determined by the desired outcome of the situation. The end justifies the choice.

a) Stealing is okay as long as I’m stealing to feed my family.

b) Not telling the truth or manipulating the truth is okay as long as no one is hurt (or you are emphasizing a point in a sermon).

2. Unlike the ethical systems developed by men, Christian ethics does not rest on arbitrary rules, but instead upon a strong foundation of Biblical absolutes.

a. Christian Ethics can be illustrated and summarized by Colossians 3:1-6.

1) The Bible gives more than a list of “dos” and “don’ts,” it gives Christians instructions on how we should live.

2) However, a paradigm made up of only “dos” and “don’ts” will not serve the Christian on a day-to-day basis.

b. Attempts at a legalistic system of rules and regulations only proves to be inadequate and empty for several reasons:

1) First, any list of laws is never long enough. (TC manuals)

2) Also, to keep some laws many times require you to break another law.

a) For example, if I see someone breaking a certain rule, I can find myself judging this person for breaking the rule, which breaks another rule, I should not judge others.

b) Or if I identify someone who is breaking a rule and I’m content that I’m not breaking the rule like that person is. This could lead to pride that is breaking the rule about not having pride.

3) In most cases legalistic list of rules end up hindering moral maturity because they don’t require growth and development.

4) And they also have a tendency to foster religious pride and superiority. (Jesus had issue with this)

a) Jesus did not advocate adherence to a list of rules while neglecting genuine faith and development. (Matthew 23:1-36)

b) In this case religious pride had settled into the religious leaders and Jesus rebuked them for it.

3. In the end, Jesus reduced a list of moral details into a limited set of principles.

a. He 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. On these two commandments hang all the law and prophets.” (Matthew 22:37-40)

1) Stephen Mott explains, “Commitment to God and the good of the neighbor is what every part of the Law is about. The other commands in Scripture have their moral meaning as they are integral to a total attitude of preparation to love God in everything and of genuine respect for one’s fellow humanity.”

b. Devotion to God and love for our neighbor provides a two-prong hook on which to hand our ethical framework for Christian Leadership.

1) Therefore, Christian ethics must be grounded in love.

a) Devotion to God and love for others function side-by- side leading the Christian toward right choices and right living.

c) Following Jesus’ ethical principles provide us with the right foundation for Christian living: vertical devotion to God and horizontal love for others.

d) Devotion to God and love for others places God in the center of a their lives.

2) Therefore, Christian leadership needs to come out of this focal point. “Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness…”

a) Christian leaders will be moral and ethical if they live to be like Jesus and live to please God.

4. The Bible has all we need to know about how to live the Christian Life, however it does not explicitly cover every situation a Christian will face in life.

a. This is where Christian ethics come in.

b. It is the principles found in God’s Word that gives us the standards by which we conduct ourselves when we are face with situations where there are no explicit instructions.

1) For example, the Bible does not say anything explicitly about the use of illegal drugs, yet based on the principles we learn in scripture, we can know that it is wrong.

2) I Corinthians 6:19-20 tells us that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and we should honor God with it.

a) Does drugs harm the body?

3) The Bible also tells us in Romans 13:1 that we are to obey the authorities that He has put over us. We must obey the laws of the land.

a) What would we do if drugs were legal? (Refer to the first principle)

c. By using the principles we find in Scripture, we can determine the ethical course for any given situation.

1) In some cases it will be simple, like the rules for Christian living we find in Colossians, chapter 3, however in other cases we will need to identify principles to respond by.

2) If our motivation is Love for God and for others we are on safe ground to make ethical choices.

d. In Addition God gave us the Holy Spirit as our teacher and guide to help us make moral and ethical choices. (John 14: 26-27)

1) In all cases we need the guidance and inspiration of the Spirit.

a) We need discernment from the Holy Spirit.

b) Discernment is the process of determining what decision would be pleasing to God.

2) The Holy Spirit helps us to fill in the blanks if we are sensitive to Him. (John 14:16-17)

**B. Practical application of Christian Ethics as it relates to leadership.**

1. As Christian leaders we are held to a higher level of moral, ethical and social standards. And this is rightly so.

a. However, it is not just a question of what we do but who we are.

1) Each Christian needs to establish certain moral filters that they use to screen their decisions and choices.

2) These filters allows us to make choices consistent with what we believe to be true, significant and appropriate according to God’s Word and the leading of the Holy Spirit.

3) We all need a personal code of ethics to govern our lives and keep us on the right path.

b. We need to do what please the Lord, but more importantly is being who we should be.

1) If we are genuine Christians then proper behavior will be a natural outcome of who we are. (Romans 8:1)

2) We will not need to worry so much about our behavior if we are being Christ-like.

3) Remember, you can give what you don’t have. You can’t lead where you have never been or are not willing to go.

4) It is an inside out process. You can’t force morality or ethical behavior. In the end it is a choice.

c. Ethical behavior comes out of a choice to please God.

2. Questions to ask ourselves when trying to make a moral or ethical choice:

a. What does the Bible say about this choice or situation?

b. What does the principles in the Bible say about this choice or situation?

c. What would Jesus do?

d. What is the Holy Spirit saying to you about this choice or situation?

e. What does good Christian counsel say about this choice or situation?

f. What does the civil laws say about this choice or situation?

g. What does organization (church, TC) say about this choice or situation?

3. What about cultural differences? How do they affect ethics?

a. Three key questions related to this:

1) Is the Word of God cross-cultural? Is it truth for all cultures? Does it say the same things in all cultures?

2) Is the Holy Spirit cross-cultural? Does He speak in all languages?

3) Is the teachings and examples of Jesus cross-cultural?

b. We need a cross-cultural Biblical world-view.

1) We must believe that there are moral absolutes and that we find them in God’s Word.

2) We have to be careful not to use situational ethics to justify our cultural reasons for making certain moral decisions and choices.

4. What do we do as Christian Leaders about what we know?

a. First and foremost if we have a problem in this area we need to confess our sins and ask forgiveness and get right with God.

b. Before making certain decisions or choices study what the Word of God says about this and pray for the leading of the Holy Spirit.

1) All wisdom comes from God.

c. We need to make sure all of our decisions are honest and ethical before, God, His Word and those in authority over us.

1) Honestly evaluate why you are doing something. What is motivating you?

d. As Christian leaders we need to commit be telling the truth no matter the situation and what it might cost.

1) We need to be careful with half-truths, manipulations, lying etc.

e. Come under authority. Make yourself accountable to good Christian leaders who will tell you the truth.

1) Listen to your wife, family, friends etc.

f. Lead not just by your words, but also more importantly by your example. Be above reproach.

g. Take responsibility for your mistakes. Learn from them and don’t try to hide them. They can be a positive springboard to the future.

h. Be careful with Pride. Pride will keep us from doing what is written above. It is a poison to our lives and to our ability to really lead.

5. Why have we chosen to be a Christian Leader?

a. The “why” question is important to God and to others.

1) What motivates us to do what we do?

2) Our ethics will reflect our motives.

3) Consistent, honest conversation with God means we will be able to see whether or not our motives are pure.

b. How people lead is also important to God.

1) If we want God’s blessing on our leadership we need to lead as Christ lead.

2) Christ came to serve and not be served (Philippines 2:1-8)

3) We to remember if we want to go up we must first go down.

4) If we try to hold on to our lives we will lose it, but if we give it away we will gain it.

c. When it comes to being a leader who pleases God, attitude is everything and motives do matter.