

ETHICS

When we make reference to ethics, what are we talking about? Generally speaking, ethics has to do with human conduct—what is right and what is wrong. When we think about the foundation of ethics, two main types of thinking (religious and secular) have to do with the foundations of morals. For the religious person, when confronted with questions concerning rightness and wrongness, or good and bad, or with decisions about what one ought to do or ought not to do, the Christian turns to God’s revelation to answer moral problems because the Christian considers God to be the ultimate foundation of morality. The secular person contends that religious concepts, such as God, have no legitimate bearing on the content of morality.

Men and women worldwide are clamoring about, trying first one thing and then another, in an attempt to discover what we ought to do in this instance or in that. All rational people, it seems, to a greater or lesser degree, are interested in, and concerned with, human ethical conduct. What ought we to do?

Dr. Edward John Carnell stated in his book, *“An Introduction to Christian Apologetics,”* *“It is evident that we must act, if we are to remain alive, but we find ourselves in such multifarious [diverse–lwc] circumstances that it is difficult to know at times whether it is better to turn to the right or better to turn to the left, or better not to turn at all. And, before one can choose a direction in which to turn, he must answer the question, better in relation to **what** or to **whom**? In other words, if a man is going to act **meaningfully** and not haphazardly, he must rationally count the cost, he must think before he acts. Right judgment, then, and proper actions always go together.”* The point is well-taken indeed. We must act in our daily lives. By what standard or standards are those actions to be measured and judged? How we ought to behave, that is the question?

I. Determining Human Conduct

- A. Sinful human beings are ever attempting to blur the distinction between “right” and “wrong.”
 1. For many, faithfulness is condemned as “intolerance,”
 2. While sordid forms of debauchery are exalted as expressions of freedom and enlightenment.
 3. Proverbs 17:15—“he that justifies the wicked, and he that condemns the righteous, both of them alike are an abomination unto Jehovah”
 4. Isaiah 5:20—“... call evil good, and good evil...”
 5. Amos 5:7—
 6. Right and wrong do exist.
- B. Morality is to be measured by the laws and principles of divine revelation, as made known in the inspired writings of the Bible.
 1. Ultimately, morality is grounded in the very nature of God Himself.
 2. I Peter 1:15— *“as he who calls you is holy, you yourselves also be holy.”*
 3. What are some principles that will help us to determine right and wrong.
- C. Personal Sensitivity...
 1. The French philosopher Rousseau wrote: *“I need only to consult myself with regard to what I wish to do ; what I feel to be right is right, what I feel to be wrong is wrong.”*
 2. But “wrong” is not determined by the perpetrator’s moral sensitivity to an act.
 3. Prov. 16:2— *“All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes...”* [self-deception]
 4. Prov. 21:2— *“Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the LORD pondereth the hearts”*
 5. Saul of Tarsus was enthusiastic in his persecution of Christianity (Acts 23:1; 26:9; I Tim. 1:13), but he was violating the will of God nonetheless.
 6. Ignorance is no excuse.
 7. People today get in situations (adulterous marriages, etc...) and then argue that they “did not know” such was a violation of God’s marriage law.
 8. Will a similar argument eventually be offered to defend the concept of “same-sex marriages?”
- D. Might Makes Right.
 1. “Right” is not established merely by what man is able to accomplish by means of his genius

and/or ability.

2. One human being presumptively can take another's life, but that does not make the act moral.
3. Two unmarried youngsters are able to conceive a child apart from the sacred vows of matrimony, but the act is illegitimate nonetheless.
4. "Might" does not make "right," and arbitrary decisions relating to moral matters are condemned in Scriptures.
5. Radical attempts at human genetic engineering, or cloning, may be accomplished eventually through the manipulation of genetic laws, but the achievement itself does not license the practice as ethical.
6. The issue must ever be: Is a procedure consistent with the principles of God's inspired revelation? If not, it is wrong, it is evil!

E. Human Law.

1. Right and wrong are not determined by what is legal.
2. In the Roman world of the Caesars, infanticide was legal, but it was not moral.
3. In some ancient cultures, a woman was not a person; she was mere property to be abused or disposed of, at the whim of her husband.
4. There are few today who would defend the ethics of this custom.
5. Homosexuality is legal, but it is moral perversion (Rom. 1:26-27).
6. The destruction of human life by means of abortion has the sanction of civil law, but the practice is abominable before the eyes of God (Prov. 6:17).

F. *Vox populi vox Dei*... The voice of the people is the voice of God.

1. But "right" and "wrong" are not grounded in what a majority of the population "votes" as ethical.
2. Jesus Christ is King, he has not implemented a democracy to determine, by majority vote, how humans being ought to behave.
 - a. Man is not qualified to be his own guide (Jer. 10:23).
 - b. Second, fallible opinion, multiplied a thousand times, does not change wrong into right.
 - c. Exodus 23:2... "You shall not follow a multitude to do evil."
3. It hardly is necessary to remind ourselves that the path of the majority is the way of destruction (Matthew 7:13-14).

G. The Cloak of Secrecy

1. "Wrong" is wrong, whether or not one is ever caught.
2. In the isolated environment of ancient Egypt, separated from his kinsmen, Joseph might well have rationalized an illicit relationship with Potiphar's wife, on the ground that his indiscretion never would be known by his family.
 - a. Gen. 39:9
 - b. There will be a time when the "skeletons come out of the closet" and "the chickens come home to roost."
 - c. Moses said, "be sure your sins will find you out..." (Num. 32:23)
 - d. Psa. 32:3 "*When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long*"
3. Many things that have been perpetrated in darkness will be revealed in light, and secret evils will be proclaimed from the rooftops.
4. Luke 12:2,3
5. To God we must confess, "You have set our iniquities before you: our secret sins [are revealed] in the light of your presence" (Psa. 90:8).
6. Secrecy does not sanctify.

H. Time Erases...

1. Wrong does not become right by virtue of passing time.
2. It is certainly the case that the public's conscience sometimes becomes dull with the passing of

years, so that what once was horrifying eventually becomes commonplace

a. Eph. 4:19

b. I Tim. 4:2

3. But wrong is still wrong, though a millennium passes.

4. Eventually, there will be accountability (2 Cor. 5:10).

I. The standard we abide by must be God's standard.

1. I Timothy 3:15– know how thou oughtest to behave thyself..

2. Word “behave” translates from Greek word which literally means “to turn back.”

3. The idea is that of return. . . returning to a divine standard of conduct and a manner of life consistent therewith.

4. II Timothy 3:16,17

5. II Peter 1:3

Con: We need to pray that God will help us to examine our practices and determine our conduct by the illumination of his Word (Psa. 119:105)-- *“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path”* rather than following human standards to eternal judgment. How do we determine ethics, human conduct, how we ought to behave? By looking at, and following the direction that God's word leads us.