

Controversial Issues Confronting Contemporary Christians

A graphic illustration of a human head in profile, facing right. The interior of the head is filled with a dense collection of small, colorful icons (green, orange, and red) representing various concepts such as ethics, religion, and social issues. The text "Christian Ethics" is overlaid in the center of the head. The left side of the head is a solid orange silhouette, and the right side is a solid green silhouette.

Christian Ethics

Course Goals:

1. To provide biblical precepts and principles in making wise choices and living a godly life in an age of moral confusion and ethical conundrums.
2. To better distinguish and discern what is right, good and virtuous.
3. To understand the foundation and fundamentals of Christian ethics compared to other ethical systems.
4. To encourage godliness as a consequence of making biblically ethical decisions in various controversial issues.

Course Curricula:

NOV General Principles

DEC Biomedical Issues

Ronald Aung-Din, MD, PA
Stephen Welden, MD

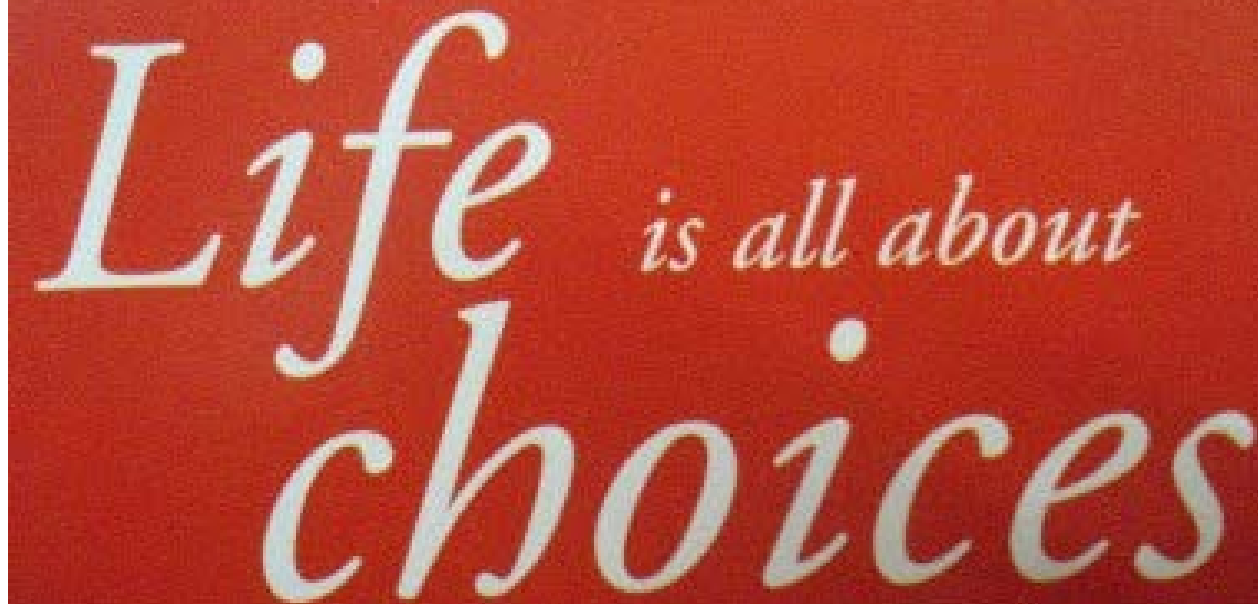
JAN Social Ethics

Eldon Johnson, Esq.
Frank Brunner

MAR Personal Ethics

APR Human Sexuality

Why study Christian ethics?



*Life is all about
choices*

Why study Christian ethics?



Why study Christian ethics?



Why study Christian ethics?

“People are far more open to discussing ethics than to discussing theistic proofs or even “transcendental arguments.” Philosophy does not excite many people today, and many do not even want to hear personal testimony and the simple gospel. But they do care about right and wrong. Christians who can talk about ethics in a cogent way, therefore, have a great apologetic and evangelistic advantage.”

John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* (p. 5)

Why study Christian ethics?

“I shall argue as well that all ethics is religious, even when it tries hard to be secular. In the end, all ethics presupposes ultimate values. It requires allegiance to someone or something that demands devotion and governs all thinking. That kind of allegiance is indistinguishable from religious devotion, even if it doesn’t involve liturgical practices. So the line between religious and secular ethics is a fuzzy one, and it is arbitrary to use such a line to determine who is entitled to join a dialogue on ethics.”

John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* (p. 5-6)

Why study Christian ethics?

Modern culture, American culture in particular, is experiencing a moral crisis of dramatic proportion. Gallup and Jones (2000) note the following evidences of the current moral crisis facing American culture:

- (1) Unsettling violence
- (2) Corruption in leadership
- (3) Lifestyle gaps
- (4) Alcohol and drug use and abuse
- (5) Poverty
- (6) Racism
- (7) Family breakdown
- (8) Consumerism and materialism

Why study Christian ethics?

According to Eckman (1999), the study of ethics is important for the following

1. Western culture has relinquished any absolute framework for thinking about ethical standards.
2. The “slippery slope” nature of so many ethical questions.
3. Christians need to understand the integrated nature of ethical issues.
4. Many Christians know where they stand on certain ethical issues but they do not know how to defend their position.

Why study Christian ethics?

- Christian maturity requires “virtue” or moral excellence (II Pet. 1:5).
- Mature Christians “have trained themselves to distinguish good and evil.” (Heb. 5:14).
- Christians must “turn from evil and do good” (I Pet. 3:11).
- Evangelism presupposes sanctification (I Pet. 3:15).

What is Ethics?

Greek: ἦθος (*ethos*) which has reference to custom, usage, manner of life, or pattern of conduct

Latin: *mōrēs* derivation of “morality” or the customary ways of behaving and believing; commonly held moral beliefs and practices.

Definition of Ethics

What Ethics is Not:	What Ethics is:
Is (normative)	Ought (prescriptive)
Do (behavior)	Should (beliefs)
Descriptive	Prescriptive
Mōrēs	Morals
Culture	Commands
Standards of	Standards for
Sociological	Theological

More Definitions

Law: a system of rules and guidelines which are enforced through social institutions to govern behavior

Culture: (cultus) of the earth

Christian: *one who has received Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord, and has the Spirit of Christ indwelling them*

Absolute: universal, fixed, unchanging, independent, nonrelative

More Definitions

Relative: situational, relational, proportional, corresponding

Post-modern: Barna (1998)

- (1) There is no grand purpose in life. The reason for living is to achieve comfortable survival.
- (2) Success is defined as the absence of pain and sacrifice, and the experience of happiness.
- (3) There is no value to focusing on or preparing for the future. Every person must live in the moment and for the moment.

More Definitions

Post-modern: (continued)

- (4) There are no absolutes. All spiritual and moral principles are relative to the situation and the individual.
- (5) There is no omnipotent, all-knowing deity that guides reality. Each person must lean on his/her own vision, competencies, power and perceptions to make the most of life.

“My belief is that if I say something it goes.
I am the law, if you don't like it you die.”



Eric Harris

Participant in Columbine High School massacre

Types of Ethical Systems

- Antinomianism
- Situationalism
- Generalism
- Unqualified Absolutism
- Conflicting Absolutism
- Graded Absolutism





Ravi Zacharias tells the story of a friend of his, Hen, who was his translator while he was preaching in Vietnam. Hen was arrested by the North Vietnamese, but had devised a plan to escape by boat. He was confronted by 3 Vietnamese guards about his plan, but he lied and said he wasn't planning on escaping. He felt convicted by God because of his lie and swore to tell the truth if asked again. The guards did indeed come back and ask, and this time he told them the truth. Amazingly, they said they wanted to go with him. Hen said they encountered a terrible storm at sea and it was only because the 3 guards were experienced sailors that they were able to survive and reach freedom.

An Example from Exodus 1:15-21

¹⁵ Then the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, of whom the name of one *was* Shiphrah and the name of the other Puah; ¹⁶ and he said, “When you do the duties of a midwife for the Hebrew women, and see *them* on the birthstools, if it *is* a son, then you shall kill him; but if it *is* a daughter, then she shall live.” ¹⁷ But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the male children alive. ¹⁸ So the king of Egypt called for the midwives and said to them,

An Example from Exodus 1:15-21

“Why have you done this thing, and saved the male children alive?” ¹⁹ And the midwives said to Pharaoh, “Because the Hebrew women *are* not like the Egyptian women; for they *are* lively and give birth before the midwives come to them.” ²⁰ Therefore God dealt well with the midwives, and the people multiplied and grew very mighty. ²¹ And so it was, because the midwives feared God, that He provided households for them.

Possible Ethical Options

- **Antinomianism** – lying is neither right nor wrong; there are no moral laws to follow
- **Situationalism** – lying may be loving thing to do and therefore is morally OK
- **Generalism** – lying is generally wrong, but in specific cases it can be broken if the results are ‘good’;; the ends justifies the means

Possible Ethical Options

- **Unqualified Absolutism** – lying is always wrong; whatever consequences come about from telling the truth should be welcomed
- **Conflicting Absolutism** – lying is forgivable because there are absolute moral laws that sometimes conflict, however the person has sinned
- **Graded Absolutism** – lying is sometimes right because there are higher absolute moral laws that sometimes conflict with lower ones; a person has not sinned

The Basis of Ethics

“We have been unable to show that reason requires the moral point of view or that really rational persons need not be egoists or classical amoralists. Reason doesn’t decide here. The picture I have painted for you here is not a pleasant one for me and reflection on this actually depresses me. Pure, practical reason even with the good knowledge of the facts will not take you to morality.”

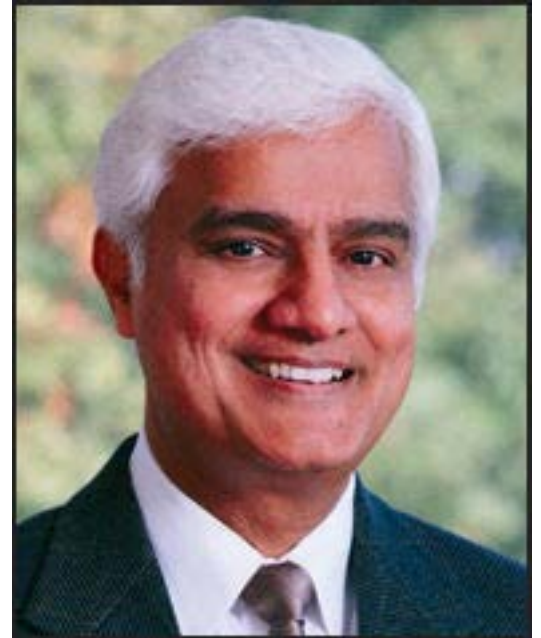
- Atheist Kai Nielson



The Basis of Ethics

“Unless we believe in a transcendent framework of reference to right and wrong, relativism will hold sway, and relativism is self-destructive and mutually contradictory.”

- Ravi Zacharias



The Basis of Ethics

The Bible Condemns Antinomianism

II Thessalonians 2:7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains *will do so* until He is taken out of the way.

I John 3:4 Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.

Romans 6:1-2 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? ² Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?

The Basis of Ethics

The Bible Condemns Antinomianism

Deuteronomy 12:8 You shall not at all do as we are doing here today—every man doing whatever *is* right in his own eyes.

Proverbs 12:15 The way of a fool *is* right in his own eyes,
But he who heeds counsel *is* wise.

Proverbs 21:2 Every way of a man *is* right in his own eyes,
But the LORD weighs the hearts.

The Basis of Ethics

“I used to live so freely. The mantra for my generation was ‘Be your own man!’ I always said, ‘Hey, you can have whatever rules you want – I’m going to have mine. I’ll accept the guilt. I’ll pay the check., I’ll do the time.’ I chose my own way. That was my philosophical position well into my 50s. As I’ve gotten older, I’ve had to adjust.”



Jack Nicholson
Parade Magazine Interview

Voltaire: “If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent Him.”



Foundational Principles

I THOU SHALT HAVE
NO OTHER GODS
BEFORE ME

II THOU SHALT NOT
MAKE UNTO THEE
ANY GRAVEN IMAGE

III THOU SHALT NOT
TAKE THE NAME
OF THE LORD THY
GOD IN VAIN

IV REMEMBER THE
SABBATH DAY,
TO KEEP IT HOLY

V HONOUR THY FATHER

VI THOU SHALT
NOT KILL

VII THOU SHALT NOT
COMMIT ADULTERY

VIII THOU SHALT
NOT STEAL

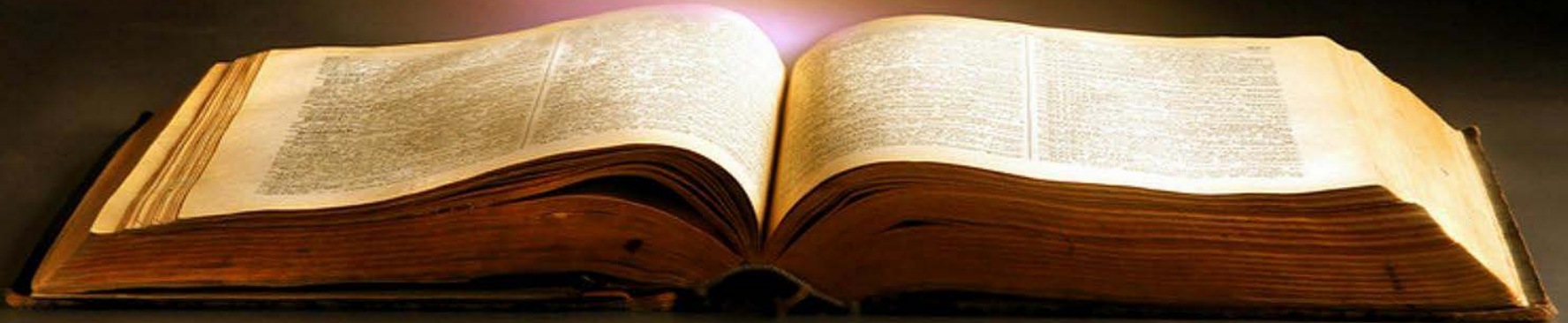
IX THOU SHALT NOT
BEAR FALSE
WITNESS AGAINST
THY NEIGHBOUR

X THOU SHALT

Foundational Principles

Basic Moral Imperative –

- "Do good & avoid evil" (Luke 6:27-36)
- Ten Commandments (Ex. 20 & Deut. 5) partially quoted in Mt. 5:17-48; Mk. 10:19
- Micah 6:8
- Jesus "Sermon on the Mount"



Foundational Principles

Greatest Commandment –

- 1) "Love the Lord, your God, with your whole heart..."
- 2) "Love your neighbor as yourself"
(Deut. 6:4; Lev. 19:18); quoted in Mark 12:29-31

Other Love Commands –

- 1) "Love your enemies" (Matt. 5:43-48; Luke 6:27-35)
- 2) "Love one another as I have loved you"
(John 13:34; 15:12-17; Rom. 13:8; 1 Thess. 4:9)

Foundational Principles

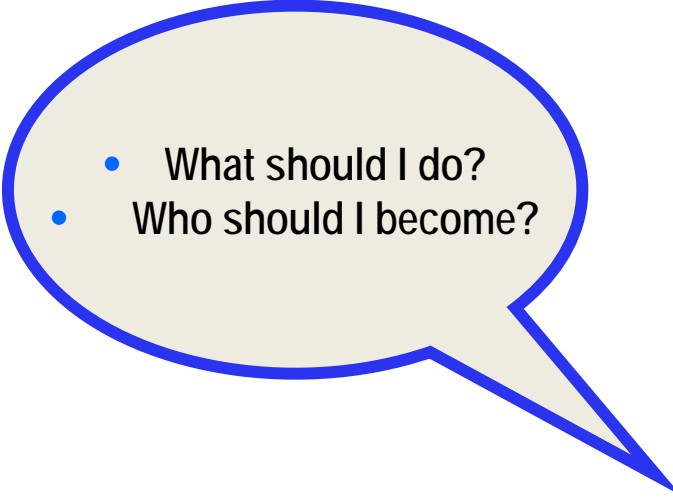
Golden Rule –

- 1) "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (Matt 6:12; par. Luke 6:31)
- 2) Related: "forgiving others" (Matt. 6:12-15), "not judging others" (Matt. 7:1-5), striving to be like God (Matt. 5:48; Luke 11:2-4; cf. Lev. 11:44-45).

Conscience –

- 1) Priority of individual conscience (follow "Inner Voice")
- 2) Obligation to develop an "informed" conscience

- 
- Is it Right?
 - Good?
 - Just?
 - Why?

- 
- What should I do?
 - Who should I become?

• **Ethics**

Morality

Reflection

Experience

Ethics

Morality