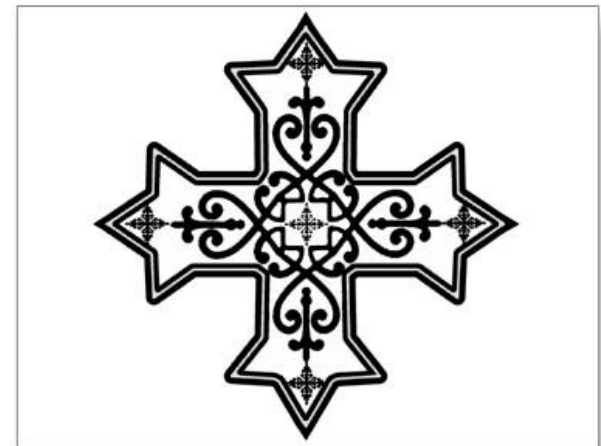


CHRISTIAN ETHICS & THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD: MORALITY

ST. MARK'S SUNDAY SCHOOL



SPECIAL AIMS OF THE LESSON

- 1. To give definition to 'Morality' and differentiate between Christian morality and world morality**
- 2. To stress the fact that we are the image of our Saviour Jesus Christ and we have to behave like Him in the world.**
- 3. To highlight the main areas of Christian morality.**
- 4. To discuss the way of practicing Christian morality.**

OUTCOMES: BY THE END OF THIS LESSON STUDENTS SHOULD BE ABLE TO:

- 1. Debate the differences between worldly morals and Christian morals.**
- 2. Discuss how Jesus Christ would behave in today's society in dealing with issues facing us.**
- 3. Issue a statement about major morals Christians must abide by and how to achieve them.**
- 4. Debate the benefits gained from adhering to Christian ethics.**

THE DEFINITION OF MORALITY

The term “morality” can be used either

1. descriptively - to refer to a code of conduct put forward by a society or,

- some other group, such as a religion, or
- accepted by an individual for her own behaviour or

2. Normatively (*to establish a norm*) - to refer to a code of conduct that, given specified conditions, would be put forward by all rational persons.

WHAT ARE CHRISTIAN ETHICS AND MORALITY?

Let's look to the Bible for the answer:

Matthew 7:12 - Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

John 13:35 - By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

Luke 6

30 Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back.

31 And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise.

32 "But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them.

33 And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same.

34 And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back.

35 But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil.

36 Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.

QUESTION: "WHAT ARE CHRISTIAN ETHICS?"

- **Colossians 3:1-6:** Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.”
- The Bible doesn't just give us a list of what's allowed and what's not allowed, it details how we are to live, i.e. gives us a way of life. However, the Bible does not explicitly cover every situation we will ever face. How then is it a sufficient guide?
- That is where Christian ethics comes in. Science defines ethics as “a set of moral principles, the study of morality.” Christian ethics would be the principles derived from the Christian faith by which we act. While the Bible (God's Word) may not cover every situation we face throughout our lives, its principles give us the standards by which we must conduct ourselves in those situations where there are no explicit instructions.

QUESTION: "WHAT IS CHRISTIAN ETHICS?" CONT...

Let's look at some Biblical examples:

1. The Bible does not say anything explicitly about the use of illegal drugs, yet based on the principles we learn through Scripture, we can know that it is wrong. For one thing, the Bible tells us that the body is a temple of the Holy Spirit and that we should honour God with it (**1 Corinthians 6:19-20**). Knowing what drugs do to our bodies—the harm they cause to various organs—we know that by using them we would be destroying the temple of the Holy Spirit. That is certainly not honouring God.
2. The Bible also tells us that we are to follow the authorities that God Himself has put into place (**Romans 13:1**). Given the illegal nature of the drugs, by using them we are not submitting to the authorities but are rebelling against them. Does this mean if illegal drugs were legalised it would be ok? Not without violating the first principle.

By using the principles we find in Scripture, Christians can determine the ethical course for any given situation. In some cases it will be simple, like the rules for Christian living we find in **Colossians, Chapter 3**. In other cases, however, we need to do a little digging. The best way to do that is to pray over God's Word. The Holy Spirit indwells every believer, and part of His role is teaching us how to live: "But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (**John 14:26**). "As for you, the anointing you received from Him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as His anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in Him" (1 John 2:27).

So, when we pray over Scripture, the Spirit will guide us and teach us. He will show us the principles we need to stand on for any given situation.

SUMMARY

While God's Word does not cover every situation we will face in our lives, it is all-sufficient for living a Christian life.

For most things, we can simply see what the Bible says and follow the proper course based on that.

In ethical questions where Scripture does not give explicit instructions, we need to look for principles that can be applied to the situation.

We must pray over His Word, and open ourselves to His Spirit. The Spirit will teach us and guide us through the Bible to find the principles on which we need to stand so we may live as a Christian should.

A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE: BY GEORGIA HARKNESS

Background: Georgia Harkness was educated at Cornell University, Boston University School of Theology, studied at Harvard & Yale theological seminaries and at Union Theological Seminary of New York. She has taught at Elmira College, Mount Holyoke, and for twelve years was professor of applied theology at Garrett Biblical Institute. In 1950 she became professor of applied theology at the Pacific School of Religion, in Berkeley, California. Published in 1957 by Abingdon Press. This book was prepared for Religion Online by Harry W. and Grace C. Adams.

Summary

Chapter 1: What is Christian Ethics? Christian ethics is defined as the systematic study of the way of life set forth by Jesus Christ applied to the daily demands and decisions of human existence.

Chapter 2: The Covenant, the Law and the Prophets - In tracing the source of Christian ethics to its Old Testament roots, the author explores the covenant and its developing radical monotheism, the law as it evolved from cultic ritual observances to a more humanitarian community of law, the prophets and their refining of Yahweh's judgment and mercy, finally to Jesus' unique understanding of God – centred moral living that moved beyond his Old Testament heritage to an exemplification of hope for the righteous rule of God in a redeemed community for this world and the next.

Chapter 3: The Ethics of Jesus - The primary and final authority for Christian ethics is found in the life, teachings, ministry and death of Jesus Christ as the revelation of God. He clarified the ethical demands of a God-centred life by applying obedient love or agape to all human situations, both personal and social, and insisted this included the earthly as well as the eternal, and required our best actions amid the relativities of the present world.

Chapter 4: Ethical Perspectives of the Early Church - Expanding from a Jewish to a Gentile world the early church concluded that no legalism, Judaic or Gentile, was adequate to fulfil the gospel standard of agape, that the Kingdom of God was already present and yet to come, and that in living the gospel in this world with its political, economic and social challenges would require faithfulness and patience.

Chapter 5: God, Sin, and Christian Character - Christian ethics begin with the assumption that Christian character is founded, not on naturalism or humanism, but on Jesus as the supreme revealer of God, that Christian virtues are not the exclusive possession of Christians, that sin is not a state of being but rebellious self-love and self-exaltation that leads to failure to be adequately responsive to the love commandment of Jesus, that humans are created free to make moral choices, and Christians are called to make these choices in light of the love commandment.

A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE. CONT...

Chapter 6: Duties to Self and Society - Jesus' love commandment assumes we will love ourselves and calls us to expand beyond self-realization to devotion to God, and concern for others. Brotherly love should not be restricted to interpersonal relations, however primary they may be, but extend to wider service, including social service and social action to those persons and institutions not known to us directly, where social sin calls for our best response in the light of the gospel.

Chapter 7: Marriage and the Family - Christian ethics establishes the family as primary in all social relations based on the explicit teachings of Jesus and their implications that monogamy is the standard, agape the controlling factor, divorce a compromise, and our relation to God the foundation.

Chapter 8: The Ethics of Economic Life - The ethics of economic life is second only to family life and covers the Christian vision of property, work and vocation, and economic justice, all stemming from the position that all things belong to God and we are to be faithful and loving stewards in managing God's world and ourselves in it.

Chapter 9: Christianity and the Race Problem - While there is agreement in principle among Christians that all persons are equal before God, the reality of racial prejudice, whether based on biology, geography, education, economics, color, nationality or any other discriminating factor, must be addressed by the church in proclaiming its gospel and putting its own house in order.

Chapter 10: The Christian Conscience and the State - Since the Christian's ultimate loyalty is to God and not the state in its demand for obedience to the law, the Christian always tempers his loyalty with insistences on justice with love that calls for an equality and liberty that holds the state's necessary powers of coercion under restraint and accountability to God.

Chapter 11: War, Peace, and International Order - Christian ethics starts from the position that God created the world for good and that war involves great evil, and calls us to a stewardship that enjoys much convergence based on agape as redeeming love, but also significant divergences over the best strategies to establish peace with justice.

Chapter 12: Christian Ethics and Culture - For twenty centuries the Christian faith has struggled to come to terms with culture, and with the Christian ethic of love has both informed and challenged the various expressions of civilized culture, particularly in the areas of science, art and education.