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SCHOOL OF PRACTICAL MINISTRY  ETHICS FOR CHRISTIAN LEADERS

ETHIC TOXICITY

OPENING SCENARIO

Pretend I'm interviewing to be the senior pastor of your church. What questions would you ask?

What prompted those questions?

Consider Your Answers and Others' Answers—

A. Name two values brought to the debate/discussion...

B. Identify two overlooked issues...

## AN OVERVIEW

PROLEGOMENA FOR ETHICAL SYSTEMS

Ethics are worldview shifters and worldview mirrors. They provide a canon of polity of correct behavior. Ethics are applied Christianity, applied theology, i.e., putting wheels to your beliefs. Ethics are hopefully transformative ("hopefully" is the operative term). [*Transformative* may be the criterion for an *effective* ethic, but not necessarily a *righteous* ethic.]

Why have a course in *Christian* ethics?

1. Everyone with a capacity to make moral judgments makes moral judgments.
  - ⌘ Infants can not (cf. Deut 1:39—"And the little ones that you said would be taken captive, your children who do not yet know good from bad—they will enter the land. I will give it to them and they will take possession of it.")
  - ⌘ Mentally handicapped can not.

2. Daily we are confronted with questions of right and wrong—ethical encounters are unavoidable.
3. Because of complexity of moral encounters, we must be aware of and understand our own moral/ethical system.
4. Socrates (Plato’s Republic) said regarding ethics, “We are discussing no small matter, but how we ought to live.” (1.352d)

Ethical Mindbyte No. 1—  
 “Always tell the truth; that way you won’t have to remember what you told people.”

#### Distinctive Characteristics of *Christian* Ethics

1. Built upon an objective theistic worldview.
2. Affirms the existence of moral absolutes.
3. Christian ethics are obligatory—not suggestions or recommendations, but are mandates for followers of Jesus the Christ.
4. Christian ethics have been perfectly modeled by Jesus the Christ. For instance,
  - ⌘ My older brother has gone before us; Jesus has prepared the way.
  - ⌘ You do not have to do/think evil; you will, but it’s your fault, not God’s.
  - ⌘ You’re working out your sanctification (with fear and trembling). Why “fear and trembling?”<sup>1</sup>
5. Christian ethics recognize and seek to participate in *God’s* moral order—already present within the created order and in special revelation.
  - ⌘ Participatory (not creative); He’s already revealed His rules, His “moral order.”
  - ⌘ Natural tendency to organize is a reflection of our Godly heritage.

Ethical Mindbyte No. 2—  
 How can *Porter’s First Law of Theology* create an ethical dilemma for society?

6. Christian ethics are ultimately universal—general revelation is sufficient for condemnation, but not justification (cf. Romans 1&2).
7. Christian ethics are attainable for Spirit indwelt believers—
  - ⌘ You have the power *if* you let Him indwell you.
  - ⌘ When you have not quenched His power, life is easy and completely freeing. The yoke is light only when *He* shares it.
8. Christian ethics are not a means of earning soteriological merit with LORD God, but rather are the natural result of merit already imputed by the LORD God.
  - ⌘ 2 Corinthians 5:21—“God made him who had no sin to be sin [or *be a sin offering*] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

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<sup>1</sup>Why fear? Why tremble? Read the next sentence: “...for it is **God** who works in you to will and to act according to **His** good purpose.”—Philippians 2:13

- ⌘ The Father became as (imputed) as an offering for our evil so we could be made right with Father God through the Christ.
- ⌘ “Forensic transfer: we got His righteousness, He got our evil.”

9. Christian ethics demand not only right conduct, but also the who and the why!! To wit, right goals *and* right character.

Criterion: “What is the most spiritually expedient?” See Isaiah 43:7ff

10. Christian ethics affirm that immorality stems from human depravity, not from human ignorance of ethics or from social conditions.

Christian ethics is the **study and application** of morals **prescribed in God’s word** that pertains to the **Conduct, Character, and Goals** required of one who professes to be in a redemptive relationship with the LORD Jesus the Christ.

### DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN “MORALS” AND “ETHICS” ...

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“Ethics” vs “Morals”

– Often used interchangeably, but ...

“Ethics” = manner of living εθοζ

(\_\_\_\_) The science of morals, the study concerned with the principles of human conduct

“Morals” = what is customary, habit

(\_\_\_\_) Distinction between what is right and wrong in relation to volition, or character of responsibility (e.g., the Ten Commandments).

ETHICS	vs	MORALS
Entire belief system		Individual acts
General perspective		Specific principles
Theory-based		Practice based
Gives the norms		Gives the rules
Focuses on resources		Focuses on requirements
“What you look to...”		“What you do ...”

Christian ethics is the attempt to understand what it means both to live **and** think in a Christian manner (i.e., being Christ-like).

Ethical Mindbyte No. 3—  
How should Christians act as Christians so they are viewed as Christians, not just as "good people?"

Ergo, is it unethical for Christians to be viewed only as "good people?"

## CONDUCT, CHARACTER, GOALS

We are equally concerned with who as well as conduct and goals. This is the complexity of Christian ethics.

### Conduct (aka "practice")

Ethical Mindbyte No. 4—  
When is premarital sex not sinful?

- ⌘ Realm of commands within deontology (*rules* based determinations of right & wrong).
  - ⌘ External behavior; i.e., the "what."
  - ⌘ Key is what is done in relation to others.

Sole focus on "conduct?" Result = legalism (keeping the law for law's sake).

Consider Galatians 3:21-22 ...

"Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus [the] Christ, might be given to those who believe."

And Romans 3:20 ...

"Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin."

THE "LAW" WAS NEVER "PLAN A."

### Character (aka "person")

- Internal focus—the "who."
- Philosophical realm = ontology of being.
- Weight of component is on the "self."

Sole focus on “character?” Result = hypocrisy; i.e., focusing on Character without simultaneous and equal focus on Conduct and Goals creates hypocrisy.

### Goals (aka “purpose”)

- ⌘ Focuses on life-orientation (the why)
- ⌘ Teleological in philosophy “design”
- ⌘ Weight is upon God

Sole focus on “goals?” Result = sloth; i.e., ethereal purpose without Conduct creates sloth.

### Bottom-Line:

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All three elements, Character, Conduct and Goals, must be taken into account when making *moral* judgments.

Thus, the *Christian* ethic is continually asking: “Is ‘it’ for the glory & honor of God?” As professors of a redemptive relationship with the Lord Jesus the Christ, we are constantly dying to self to be “ethical.”

Certain conduct (e.g., adultery or murder) is always considered to be immoral. Why? Because assumptions about character and goals are an integral part of what defines such conduct.

Conduct can not be legitimately considered apart from character and goals. Consider Romans 14:14,20 ...

“As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food [or *that nothing*] is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean.”

...

“Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble.”

1 Timothy 4:1-5 ...

“The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. <sup>2</sup>Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. <sup>3</sup>They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. <sup>4</sup>For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, <sup>5</sup>because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.”

Titus 1:15

“To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted.”

IF inherently evil conduct exists, then ...

- ⌘ Evil is creative in nature, not distortive.
  - ⌘ All that God made is not good, or God becomes the author of evil.
    - ⌘ Repentance makes no sense—evil actions require repentance.

μετανοεω = repent, change the mind.

“WE NEED NO IDOLS FOR WE ARE CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD.”

### Examples where Conduct cannot be evaluated without Character and Goals ...

- ⌘ Murder (Exodus 20:13) vs. capital punishment (Genesis 9:5-6)
- ⌘ Rape (Deut. 22:23-25) vs. Premarital sex (Deut 22:25-27)
- ⌘ Eating meat sacrificed to idols: Romans 14:6, 15, 21; 1 Corinthians 8:13, 10:25-26; Revelation 2:14, 20 ...
  - ✓ [to the church at Pergumum] “Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality... [to the church in Thyatira] ... Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols.”
- ⌘ Usury – depends on who (brother or who is a foreigner) Deut 23:19-20
- ⌘ Truth spoken without love is evil (cf. Ephesians 4:15).

“The purpose of the Law is to crush you, to make you totally dependent upon God. But God redeems.”

God even takes our evil and makes righteousness out of it—e.g., Moses’ murder, David’s murder and adultery, and especially Jesus’ crucifixion by the world; even a donkey (see Numbers 22:20-40).

## CONDUCT, CHARACTER, GOALS

1. Most ethical systems emphasize (or over emphasize) a particular aspect of morality.
2. Conduct is behavioral and often qualifiable.
3. Conduct is the level upon which most moral judgments are usually made in the public square.
4. Over-emphasis on any particular aspect of morality will lead to problems.
5. Thus, **all three** components of morality are integrated [and only intellectually divisible.]

Ethical Mindbyte No. 5—  
If two of the three components of Christian ethics are true, does that produce an ethical third?

“Christian ethics is the **study and application** of morals **prescribed in God’s word** that pertains to the **conduct, character, and goals required** of one who professes to be in a redemptive relationship with the Lord Jesus the Christ.”

Thus, Christian ethics have God as their moral source, and are *equally* concerned with Character, Conduct and Goals.

## SPECIAL REVELATION: THE LAW AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO GOD

“The Nature of the Law” ... The relationship is critical because the answer will affect/effect (?) the foundation for answering these questions:

- (1) Law and Gospel, (2) Law and Law, and (3) Law and Man

Bunyan: “The man who does not know the nature of the Law cannot know the nature of sin. And he who does not know the nature of sin cannot know the nature of the Savior.”

Euthyphro's Dilemma:

“Is what is moral commanded by God because it is moral, or is it moral because it is commanded by God?” Or, in other words, what makes the Law true? The dilemma has continued to present a problem for theists since Plato presented it, and is still the object of theological and philosophical debate.<sup>2</sup> *How* we resolve this dilemma says much about how we regard the LORD God.

Ethical Mindbyte No. 6—  
The Euthyphro Dilemma in Christian terms:

Are God’s commands true—  
Because He’s God,  
or because ...  
God’s commands are true?

For example...  
Is it wrong to commit adultery because *God* said so, or because it is inherently wrong to commit adultery?

<sup>2</sup>While useful heuristically, but for the Christian, this is a potentially a stupid debate for it assumes God is not who He says He is. Such a debate fails to recognize the reality of an omniscient and perfectly righteous God, our God, Jehovah.

THREE PARADIGMS:  
AUTHORITY OVER LAW, AUTHORITY UNDER LAW, AND AUTHORITY IS LAW

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**I. Authority over Law Paradigm**

God's laws are right and true because God commanded them. The true power rests in God's ability to espouse legislation—most common view of the nature of law.

Problems

1. God as a tyrant – “a kill the babies” whimsical deity who can change His mind; calls into question His inerrancy, infallibility and authority.
2. God as arbitrary, capriciousness; reduces God to an authoritarian.
3. God's goodness is limited by His power—limits scope even His legitimacy of praise-worthiness.
4. Thus, God could have said, without the cross, “I forgive you.” Atonement becomes necessary.

**II. Authority under Law Paradigm**

God's laws are right and true because God commanded what is right and true. The true power of the Law resides within the Law's own righteousness and truthfulness.

Problems

1. The Law becomes a “god” in that it transcends God who Himself conforms to the Law.
2. God's goodness is reduced to His wisdom—limits His scope and perhaps even His praise-worthiness.
3. Atonement becomes impossible because God is unable to change a law above Him to which He Himself must conform.

**III. Authority is Law Paradigm**

God's laws are true and right because they reflect God's moral character which is right and true. The true power of the Law rests in the fact that the Law is a reflection of God's character.

The Law is not God, but the Law's content is an expression of God's character. Just as man reflects God: Stated belief + actual practice = actual belief. See, for instance, Proverbs 23:7 and Matthew 12:34, 15:18 ...

Ethical Mindbyte No. 7—  
What do we know about God given His commandment against adultery?

“... for as he thinks within himself, so is he” and “You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.” and



“But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man ‘unclean.’”

The Law is a revelation about God, not just by God.

### Evidence for Authority is Law

1. Explains **sanctification** – we become holy (like God) when we keep the Law – process = Sanctification
  - ⌘ Ephesians 5:1 – “Be imitators of God”
  - ⌘ 1 Peter 1:15-16 – “Be holy, for I am holy”
  - ⌘ Leviticus 11:44 – “I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy.”
  
2. Let Holy Spirit work – follow the Law, He will show you – Don’t quench Him, let Holy Spirit do what He does – To be a viable container of Holy Spirit, you become holy.

**[The Law is Holy because God is Holy.]**

“This paradigm explains how Christians ultimately sin against God when they break His Law”
  - Genesis 39:9 – Joseph: How then can I do this against God.
  - Psalms 51:4 – David: Against You and You alone have I sinned.
  
3. When you have done/thought evil, you have done/thought evil against God, not the rule/law. [Hence, the seductive “usefulness” of eliminating God, in our mind, as the source of the Law; or, as merely a reflection of God’s character.]
  
4. Explains necessity **and** sufficiency of the **atonement**. For God [alone] can forgive men of transgressions of His Law on account of His Son’s propitiation (cf. John 3:16; Hebrews 2:17).

“You are not [viewed as] a forgiven sinner – when God looks at you, He sees His Son.” Just as if you had never sinned. We have become credited with His righteousness – not yours.
  
5. Explains **accountability**. Even without [special revelation] Biblical knowledge, His moral character (the Law) is manifested in Creation. Acts 17:26-27; Romans 1:18-20, 2:14-15.

Thus, general revelation is sufficient for condemnation, but not redemption.
  
6. Explains the **God invention, re-invention phenomenon** (cf. Romans 1:21-23)

Explains why people who reject the Law reject God and thus re-invent God to meet their expectations. The “law” thus becomes a reflection of ourselves, instead of a higher authority.

A SIDEBAR ON SALVATION

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- ⌘ Becoming like what God views you; thus, clearly not a matter of merit.
  - ⌘ Value of Christian company: Building your sanctification.
  - ⌘ “When lost people come to your church, they should leave offended, confused, wondering—”  
[not spiritually fat and happy]
  - ⌘ “Mimic the Christ, not the world.” [when appealing to the world]
  - ⌘ Condemnation is often forgotten as part of understanding the Gospel
-