

## Practical Theology

Adapted from *The Church & Society* Syllabus by Henry W. Hollomon (1981-82)

### PART ONE: BASIC PRINCIPLES OF PERSONAL CHRISTIAN ETHICS

#### I. Definition of Christian Ethics

##### A. Etymological considerations

1. The word ethic (s) - Latin: *Ethicus* Greek: ηθικός - ethos which may be specifically used of moral character and is related to the more general, primary meaning of ethos (or ēthos) which is “\_\_\_\_\_,” “usage, or “habit”<sup>1</sup>
2. Ethos occurs 12 times and ēthos 1 time in the NT.
3. The one occurrence of ēthos in the NT is the plural form found in 1 Cor. 15:33
  - a. Its usage in this context comes very close to the idea of ethical conduct or \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. The expression, ēthē chrēsta (1 Cor. 15:33)<sup>2</sup>, has been translated in various but similar ways:
    - (1) RSV, NASB- -”Good morals”
    - (2) NIV - “Good character”
    - (3) KJV - “Good manners”

##### B. Corresponding concept.

1. The concept of Christian ethics is probably more clearly represented by the word ana strophē (ἀναστροφή) than any other word in the N.T.
2. It occurs 13 times in the NT and means “\_\_\_\_\_,” “conduct” or “behavior”<sup>3</sup>

For example, the expression, hagiai anastrochais (2 Pet. 3:11), has been translated in various but similar ways:

  - a. Arndt and Gingrich<sup>4</sup>, NASB – “holy conduct” (p1. form would include all vanities of conduct).
  - b. RSV – “Lives of holiness”
  - c. KJV - “holy conversation”

##### C. Contemporary meaning (as used by evangelical Christians).

Christian ethics deals with the principle of right conduct as prescribed by the \_\_\_\_\_

#### II. Development of Christian Ethics

##### A. Sources suggested.

Evangelical Christians have traditionally viewed the Bible as the sole authoritative source for the development of Christian ethics. However, there are those who profess to be Christians who do not regard the Bible as the only source of religious authority or even the primary source. We will now present and evaluate some of the main sources which have been suggested for the development of “Christian ethics.”

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<sup>1</sup>William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (4th ed. rev.; Chiago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 127, 345.

<sup>2</sup>Arndt and Gingrich, P. 345, has “good habits.”

<sup>3</sup>Arndt and Gingrich, p. 61.

<sup>4</sup>Arndt and Gingrich, p. 61.

## 1. Human Speculation

- a. This approach uses human reason \_\_\_\_\_ divine revelation and spiritual illumination
- b. Evaluation of unaided human reason in the development of “Christian ethics.”
  - (1) Cannot properly understand God, nor true Christian conduct  
See Job 11:7; 1 Cor. 1:21; Eph. 1:17-19.
  - 2) Cannot \_\_\_\_\_ man’s true moral condition  
Contrast Christ’s teaching in Matthew 7:11, “. . . *you being evil . . .*” that man is basically evil the generally held idea that man is basically good
  - (3) Cannot properly perceive \_\_\_\_\_ reality  
See John. 3:3; 1 Cor. 2:11.
  - (4) Cannot properly formulate \_\_\_\_\_ of conduct  
See Matt. 15:9.  
Note also the divine standard in Matthew 5:44  
Some popular but unbiblical ideas of human conduct:
    - (a) Do it to others before they do it to you
    - (b) Look out for #1
    - (c) If it feels good, do it, if it hurts, let it lie
    - (d) He who dies with the most toys wins
    - (e) Go for the gusto - you only go around once

Summary Conclusion: These inabilities of the natural man with purely human knowledge to develop Biblical Christian ethics points up the need for divine revelation and the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. John 16:7-15; 1 Cor. 2:9-16

## 2. Christian Practices

- a. This approach follows the methodology of \_\_\_\_\_ ethics
- b. In general, the practice of following the most \_\_\_\_\_ in a given culture  
There are no absolute morals, only relative ones  
E. g., “when in Rome do as the Romans
- c. In line with this methodology, the Christian would then practice the most \_\_\_\_\_ within a given group of Christians  
E.g., if over half the people within a given Christian denomination use alcoholic drink, then it is proper Christian conduct for everyone in that denomination to partake  
There would be tension between the dominant culture and the Christian subculture
- d. Criticism of this approach to “Christian ethics.”
  - (1) Christian practice is inevitably imperfect, this is why descriptive Christian ethics \_\_\_\_\_  
See 1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 3:13-14; 1 John 1:8, 10.
    - (a) “Christendom,” in a broad sense, has perpetrated some of the worse atrocities in human history - .
    - (b) All too frequently, history reveals man’s inhumanity to man under the banner of “Christianity.”
  - (2) Christian practice may be \_\_\_\_\_ (1 Sam. 16:7 - man looks on outward, God looks at the heart).

- (a) E.g., Motivation in Christian ethics - 1 Cor. 13:2
- (b) It is possible to practice mimicry of prevalent “Christian” conduct without understanding Christian motives and goals for conduct. Acts 4:36 - 5:11: Barnabas gives properly, Ananias & Saphria give with wrong motives

e. Correction of this approach to “Christian ethics.”

(1) Christian practice must be evaluated by Scripture - Isaiah 8:20; John 17:17

(2) Christian practice must be based on an \_\_\_\_\_ - Jer 10:23; Psalm

119:133

God does not determine proper Christian conduct by polling the sinners frolicking below

(a) Thus, Biblical principles must precede and govern Christian ethical practice

(b) This is the prescriptive approach to Christian ethics

Summary Conclusion:

(1) A thorough study of Christian ethics does not disregard the history of Christian practice

(2) However, \_\_\_\_\_ itself and not Christian practice remains the only reliable source of true Christian ethics

### 3. Biblical Revelation

a. 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21 – Divine origin

b. OT cf. Matt. 5-7; 2Cor. 3; Hebrews - revelation is progressive in its historical exposure

Also, note for example, moving from old covenant to new covenant. Sacrifices, divorce, etc.

The capstone of ethical conduct is found in New Testament revelation - and it builds on the O.T not contradicts it.

c. John 17:17 cf. John 10:35; Matt. 5:18 – \_\_\_\_\_

d. 2 Tim. 3:15-17; 2 Pet. 1:3 cf. Deut. 29:29 - sufficient in scope

The Bible provides principles applicable to any situation that can arise in life

Summary Conclusion:

Biblical revelation provides a \_\_\_\_\_ and adequate source of Christian ethics.

### B. Principles involved.

1. Luke 18:19, “No one is good except God, alone” –

The highest good / valuation or axiological / summum bonum emphasis

2. 2 Tim. 3:15-17 cf. John 3:3; 1 Cor. 3:11; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:8-10 – Salvation through faith in Christ

\_\_\_\_\_ emphasis. The person cannot play Christian and win

3. Matt. 4:4; John 17:17; 13:17 cf. Psalm 119:133; Isa. 8:20 – \_\_\_\_\_ emphasis - Infallible norms

4. Matt. 22:37-40, esp. v. 10; 1 Cor. 13:1-14 – \_\_\_\_\_ emphasis. - indispensable motive - love

a. The principles of love. -

(1) 1 Cor. 13:13; Gal. 5:22; Col. 3:14; 1 Pet. 4:8 – Love is the primary Christian virtue

(2) 1 John 4:19 cf. Romans 5:5; 2 Cor. 5:14-15; Gal. 2:20; 1 John 3:16-.-

Love must be experienced in a redemptive sense before it can be properly expressed in a truly Christian ethical sense.

- (3) Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:37-40; John 13:34-35—  
Love can not be compelled - i.e. you cannot force someone to love them, but it can be divinely commanded
- (4) Romans 5:5; Gal. 5:22 -  
Love of true spiritual quality (agape) is produced only by the \_\_\_\_\_
- (5) John 14:15, 21; 15:10; 2 John 6 –  
Love for Christ necessarily involves obedience to His commandments
- (6) John 14:21- Love is not allowed to discover or dictate \_\_\_\_\_ of conduct  
(a) Eph. 4:15; 2 John 1-2 – Genuine Biblical love is inseparable from Biblical truth  
(b) In situation ethics (relative morality) “love” is allowed to dictate what is right conduct in any given context  
Doing the loving thing then becomes the individuals \_\_\_\_\_ rather than prescribed Biblical commands
- (7) Roman 8:4; 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14 — Love is the fulfilling of the Law
- (8) John 3:16; Gal. 2:20; 1 John 3:16 — Love seeks the highest good for the object loved  
(a) This principle can help avoid the frequent confusion between selfish lust and sacrificial love  
(b) E.g., when one person tells another person of the opposite sex (and they are not marriage partners), “I love you, so lets express it sexually.”  
(c) This approach fails to consider whether or not such an act is really for the highest good of the person loved. It really means “I love me & I lust you” instead of “I love you.”
- (9) John 15:13 — Love is \_\_\_\_\_
- (10) Love is not legalistic (Rom. 6:14; 14:1-23; 2 Cor. 10:12) nor sentimentalistic (Heb. 12:5-11). Love edifies, it builds up. Legalism tears down
- (11) James 2:1-13, esp. v. 8 - Love is \_\_\_\_\_
- (12) Rom. 12:21; 1 Cor. 13:5 – Love is not overcome by evil, but it \_\_\_\_\_ by doing good

b. The objects of love.

- (1) Matt. 22:37-38 - Vertical - love for \_\_\_\_\_
- (2) Matt. 22:39; Eph. 5:28-29, 33 — Love for \_\_\_\_\_  
(a) Eph. 5:28-29 – involves a preservative care for oneself  
(b) Matt. 22:39, “*You shall love your neighbor as yourself,*” cf. Eph. 5:29 – no one hates his own flesh. Assumes as a fact rather than command  
Idea that “*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*” - assumes love of self  
(c) Based on principle that one must have a proper care for self before one can properly love someone else See Phil. 2:3-4.  
(d.) 2 Tim. 3:2 — in contrast to legitimate self love (care for oneself), this passage presents the sin of selfishness or egotism (narcissism)
- (3) Eph. 5:5, 28, 33; Tit. 2:4 cf. I Tim. 5:8– \_\_\_\_\_

(4) John. 13:34-35; 15:13; 1 John 3:16 – \_\_\_\_\_ - love for other Christians  
Rom. 12:10 – Love our fellow Christians more than ourselves

(5) Matt. 22:39-40; Lk. 10:29-37; Gal. 6:10 - Love for \_\_\_\_\_ - Horizontal

(6) Matt. 5:44, “love your enemies” - \_\_\_\_\_

5. 1 Pet. 2:21; Matt. 11:29; Eph. 5:1-2 cf. John. 8:29, 46 – The Perfect Example: Christ Himself  
\_\_\_\_\_ / modeling emphasis (cf. Lk. 6:40).

The question, “*What would Jesus do in the situation*” is a proper general principle (Sheldon: *In His Steps*) Thomas A’ Kempis - “*Imitation of Christ*”

Note Bernard Ramm’s treatment of “the Christological test” in his book, *The Right, the Good and the Happy*, pp. 34-35.

6. Psalm. 40:8; Eph. 5:17; Col. 4:12 cf. Rom. 12:1-2 – The Direction of Life - God’s Will  
\_\_\_\_\_ or Decisional emphasis (cf. Jos. 24:15).

a. Acts 17:30, “. . . God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent” and 9 of the 10 commandments (excepting the Sabbath law) — Scripture gives certain commands that apply to all men.

b. John 13:34-35; 1 Thess. 5:16-18 – commands that apply to all believers

c. Doing the known will of God is prerequisite for discovery and doing the unknown will of God  
Cf. e.g., Gen. 24:27; John. 7:17; Rom. 12:1-2.

The Christian is to concentrate on doing the immediately known will of God, and as he continues to do so, he experiences the perfect (specific) will of God for his life

There is a life of no regrets – a life lived in God’s perfect will

7. The Essential Enablement - God’s Power

\_\_\_\_\_ emphasis.

a. This aspect is either omitted or de-emphasized:

(1) In \_\_\_\_\_

Mottos: “You alone can do it.” “Possibility thinking.” “Corporately: We are all we got”

(2) And in \_\_\_\_\_. My flesh can conform to the Law

b. The operation of this principle originates from: God in general

(1) Phil. 2:13; Heb. 13:20-21 – God in general

(2) Zech. 4:6; Gal. 5:22-23 cf. Rom. 8:2-4,8-9 – Holy Spirit in particular

(3) Phil. 4:14 - Through Christ

Summary Conclusion:

True Christian ethics involves a \_\_\_\_\_

8. True Values - Proper Discretion

\_\_\_\_\_ emphasis.

a. Isa. 26:3; 2 Cor. 10:5; Psalm. 1:2; Phil. 4:8 cf. Prov. 23:7– standards for mental occupation

b. 1 Cor. 2:15-16; Phil. 1:9-10; 1 Thess. 5:21-22 cf. Rom. 16:19 – provision for careful discretion

9. Isa. 42:8; 43:7; Matt. 5:16; 1 Cor. 10:31 – Ultimate goal - God's glory

\_\_\_\_\_ emphasis.

10. The Practical Results - A Meaningful life

\_\_\_\_\_ emphasis.

a. \_\_\_\_\_ results.

(1) Present.

(a) Psalm. 1:1-2; Matt. 5:3-12; John 13:17 – Blessings / happiness

(b) Eph. 2:8-10; Tit. 2:14; 3:8 – Good works

(c) John 15:5; 2 Pet. 1:8 cf. Matt. 7:20 – Spiritual fruit

(2) Future – Eternal rewards (John 15:16; Rev. 22:12 cf. Matt. 19:29).

b. \_\_\_\_\_ results – Goodness to others (Gal. 6:10 cf. Acts 10:38).

This point leads to Christian social ethics

Most secular ethical systems end up centering around one of the above 10 systems.