

And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰ so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. (Col 1:9 ESV)

A. Definition of Christian Ethics:

1. Any study that answers the question,

“What does God teach us through the whole Bible that we should do in any given situation?”

a. Thus, Christian ethics is the study of how to live the Christian life.

b. Why the Bible?

→ because that is the primary place God speaks to us, and the only certain place God speaks to us

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; ² but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. ³ He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. (Psa 1:1 ESV)

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. (Psa 119:105 ESV)

How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. (Psa 119:9 ESV)

Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD! ² Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart, ³ who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways! ⁴ You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently. ⁵ Oh that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes! ⁶ Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your commandments. ⁷ I will praise you with an upright heart, when I learn your righteous rules. ⁸ I will keep your statutes; do not utterly forsake me! (Psa 119:1-8 ESV)

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work. (2Ti 3:16 ESV)

→ finding what the “whole Bible” says is simple, and it’s not simple

And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." (Mat 22:37-40 ESV)

c. Living a life pleasing to God is only possible in personal fellowship with God

He must teach us or we will not understand the Bible rightly.

The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. (1Co 2:14 ESV)

He must empower us or we will be unable to live what he teaches us.

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. (Joh 15:5 ESV)

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. (Phi 2:12 ESV)

We must live in fellowship with him or our life will lack joy and we will go astray.

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life

I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.
(Gal 2:20 ESV)

I bless the LORD who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me.⁸ I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.⁹ Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. (Psa 16:7-9 ESV)

2. The kind of study implied by this approach

a. The Bible: Collecting, understanding, and synthesizing all the relevant Biblical passages on a topic

(1) at first this might sound very difficult

(2) but we should have hope that it is possible

(3) God wants us to understand his commandments so that we can obey him!

1 John 5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.

John 14:15 "If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

Psalm 1:1 Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;² but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.

b. The situation: Gathering information and understanding the situation correctly

(1) sometimes we don't know what God wants us to do in a situation because we need more information about the situation

(2) This is why truth is so important, and having true information is essential to making a right decision

c. Applying the Bible rightly to the situation

(1) Wisdom = the skill of rightly applying the Bible to each situation

(2) This is not automatic or mechanical, or necessarily easy.

- It is a skill that we grow in throughout the Christian life

- God's will is always best discovered in personal fellowship with God

(3) God wants us to be able to do this rightly

James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.

d. It is important to pray for God's help to do this rightly, with discernment

James 1:5-6 (see above): for wisdom

Phil 1:9-11: And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, (Gk *aisthēsis*)¹⁰ so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ,¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. (Phi 1:9-11 ESV)

e. Prayer about situations will often result in being guided by the Holy Spirit in the right paths

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. (Rom 8:14 ESV)

But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. (Gal 5:18 ESV)

3. A note on philosophical ethics (= studying ethics apart from the Bible, using general revelation and reason)

a. This also is a valuable discipline

b. But not my emphasis

c. We begin with some assumptions:

(1) What is good?

→ what God approves

(2) Why is it good?

→ because God approves it

(he is the ultimate standard of good and evil, of right and wrong)

Psalm 119:68 You are good and do good; teach me your statutes.

Deuteronomy 32:4 "The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he.

Revelation 15:3 And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great are

amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! 4 Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed."

(3) How can we find out what God approves?

→ read the Bible (see verses above under A.1.b.)

B. The theological basis for ethics: the character of God

1. The problem faced by secular ethics: how can you get from "is" to "ought"?

→ How can you move from knowing what exists in the universe ("what is") to any moral standards of what is right and wrong, any standards of what should and should not be done ("what ought to be")?

– a very difficult problem for secular philosophers and ethicists

– leads some people to think that all moral values are just human inventions. If that is so, then who is to say that one person's moral values are better than anyone else's?

– this is the assumption of much of society today

– it makes them mad at people who claim to know right and wrong (they think it's arrogant)

– but Christians see this situation very differently:

2. The Bible teaches us that what "is" before anything else is God

a. And God's character is morally good. (God is not a morally neutral object but a morally good Person.)

- loving, just, merciful, faithful, truthful, holy and so forth

b. What ought to be in the universe is moral creatures who conform to God's character

- loving, just, merciful, faithful, truthful, holy, and so forth

these are the qualities God approves of in himself, and therefore these are these are the qualities that he approves of in his creatures

c. God is also the Lord of all that exists, and he therefore has the right to command us regarding right and wrong: Revelation 4:11 "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."

Exodus 20:1 And God spoke all these words, saying, ² "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. ³ "You shall have no other gods before me.

d. What then did he create us for? What does he want us to do?

- God created us for his own glory, and we glorify him by reflecting his character in our lives

Isaiah 43:6 I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, ⁷ everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."

3. Many commands show that God delights to see his character reflected in our lives

Genesis 1:27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Ephesians 5:1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.

1 John 4:19 We love because he first loved us.

Luke 6:36 Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

Matthew 5:48 You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

1 Peter 1:15 but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶ since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

Colossians 3:9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

1 John 3:2 Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we will be like him, because we shall see him as he is. ³ And everyone who thus hopes in him

purifies himself as he is pure.

1 John 2:6 whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

4. This means that God could not have made other moral standards for us or for angels or for any other worlds or creatures he might have created.

(I don't mean temporary commands like OT animal sacrifices, but permanent moral commands in Scripture.)

5. It also means that God's moral standards as found in the Bible are relevant for all people, all cultures, all times
Genesis 18:25 Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?"

Psalms 96:12 let the field exult, and everything in it! Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy¹³ before the LORD, for he comes, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness.

Acts 17:31 because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

1 Peter 4:4 With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you;⁵ but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

6. It also means that God's moral standards will never cease to be valid for us (they will also be right in heaven)

C. Personal requirements for studying ethics

1. Prayer and maintaining a right relationship with God

1 Corinthians 2:14 The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

1 John 3:21 Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God;²² and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him.

2. Trust in God that he will teach us his ways and empower us to obey him

James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.⁷ For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;

Philippians 2:12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

3. Humility

James 1:19 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger;²⁰ for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness that God requires.

James 3:13 Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.¹⁴ But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth.¹⁵ This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.¹⁶ For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.¹⁸ And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

4. Personal salvation (before anything else!)

He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. (Joh 1:11 ESV)

All of the class lessons and outlines are posted on the class website www.christianessentialsbc.com.