

BIBLICAL ETHICS

WEEK 3: PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

- The challenge which is placed upon every Christian is to live as Christ in every area of their life during every moment of their life.
- **1 Peter 1:14-16** “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, **be holy yourselves also in all your behavior**; because it is written, ‘you shall be holy, for I am holy.’”
- The purpose of this six-week class is to not only define ethics and the importance of finding our ethics from the Bible, but also how Christians should be thinking and acting in this age.
- Our world is a marketplace of ideas. And whether the ideas we face are religious, political, economic, or social, decisions about those ideas are unavoidable. We have to make choices. When it comes to making choices, we have entered the realm of “ethics.”¹
- We are all ethicists. Each day of our lives we face decisions about how we should live. As we do, we realize that many of the choices we make are not devoid of significance. Rather, we know that somehow and in some way they do matter. In short, we are continually making decisions that are ethical in nature.²
- Since we do make decisions on a regular and continual basis, we must have a fundamental understanding of what biblical ethics are and how we can rightly apply them.
- **2 Peter 3:17** “You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, **be on your guard** so that you are not carried away by the error of *unprincipled men* and fall from your own steadfastness.”
 - Notice how Peter gives the command to *be on your guard*. The purpose of this command is so that we would not be passively *carried away*.
 - Our minds are constantly being fought over by the world for control. We must be able to sift out what does not need to be there and hold fast to what is good.

¹ David Burggraff

² Ibid.

INTRODUCTION TO THE CLASS

- Today, we are going to finish up some things from last week and then get into some ethical decisions that are being debated throughout our culture today.

CONTINUED FROM LAST WEEK³

Think and act differently than the culture you live in.

- **Christian ethics is firmly absolutist.** It is based on the character of an unchanging God “who cannot lie” (Titus 1:2). It is manifested in God’s law which “cannot be broken” (John 10:35) and in the person of Jesus Christ who “is the same yesterday, today and forever” (Heb. 13:8).
- Relativism is no option for a Christian. To be realistic, however, we live in a relativistic age. “Absolutism” is for most people we are around an archaic and untenable concept.
- For Christians the source of morality is God’s revelation.
- When asked why we believe some things are right and others are wrong, we have but one answer: *because God said so.*
- How do we know what God has said?
- We know it because God revealed it.
- **The nature of morality @ Christian:**
 - Morality is objective, not subjective.
 - Morality has an absolute basis.
 - Morality is normative, not utilitarian.
 - Morality is discovered, not created by man.
- **The superiority of the Christian view of right.**
 - A superior source: God.
 - A superior personal manifestation: Christ
 - A superior ethical declaration: the Bible.
 - A superior motivation: the love of Christ.

THE DOCTRINAL BASIS FOR CHRISTIAN ETHICS

What you do is based on what you believe.

- Beliefs determine behavior. (ex: Epistle of James).

³ David Burggraff

- Doctrine is closely related to action throughout the entire New Testament.
 - In most of his epistles, Paul lays a doctrinal foundation and then shifts in the later chapters to practical exhortation from that doctrinal basis.
 - Ephesians 4:1-3 begins just such a practical section. Notice also 2 Tim. 3:16-17; and Titus 3:8.
- Theology governs ethics. (*one of the reasons we are a teaching church*)
 - Practice (one's conduct) is important, but principles are far more so, because understanding and knowledge are essential to right outcomes in practice. Conversely, right practice is evidence of the existence of right principles. What we sincerely and actually believe and think makes us what we are and determines what we do.

Basic Tenets of Christian Ethics

- **Theological tenet (the Character of God). Four truths regarding God:**
 - God is the source of all things. Gen. 1:1; Jn. 1:1-3
 - God is a person. Gen. 1:1
 - God is supreme and holy. Isa. 6:3; 1 Pet. 1:16; Ps. 25:8
 - A thing that is in conformity to the will and character of God is good.
 - A thing that is contrary to the will and character of God is bad, evil, wrong.
 - God is absolutely unchangeable. Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8
- **Anthropological tenet**
 - A central insight of an authentically Christian morality (ethic) is its realism concerning the limitations of human nature.
 - Christian morality addresses the human situation with an informed realism about its strictly limited possibilities.
 - The doctrine of original sin destroys naïve views of human perfectibility. There is, according to this doctrine, something inherently wrong with human nature, something that makes it self-centered, rebellious and disobedient.⁴
 - Because of Adam's sin (Gen 3), there is an **impulse to sin (depravity)** within all human beings.
- **Soteriological tenet**
 - God in His grace has made provision for the restoration of man.
 - Sacrifice is the means by which the penalty of sin is removed. Heb. 9:1-28
 - Faith is the means by which restoration can be affected. Heb. 10:10, 35, 38; 11:1, 6.
 - The provision for restoration is itself ethical.

⁴ McGrath, *Doctrine and Ethics* 152.

- Jesus Christ met the demands of God’s holiness
- The satisfaction of Christ is three-fold. Gal. 2:20
 - Life from Christ (Calvary)
 - Life in Christ (“Christ lives in me”- indwelling)
 - Life of Christ (“I now live” - Christian living is allowing Christ to live through us).

ABORTION

- Abortion refers to stopping something that has started, and when applied to pregnancy, it refers to ending lives that have started.⁵
- **When does life begin?**
- By far, this is the most debated question in the abortion discussion. If something is not a “life,” then it does not matter if it is aborted or not. If there is nothing but a lump of cells in a woman’s body, and she decides to get rid of that lump of cells, then it should not matter.
 - There are clearly significant differences in the way that the scientific community views the beginning of life. There is no obvious consensus among scientists about when human life begins. So, can science really help us answer this question? Perhaps science, by its nature, is not capable of dealing directly with this problem. Scott Gilbert, PhD, professor of biology at Swarthmore College, notes, “If one does not believe in a ‘soul,’ then one need not believe in a moment of ensoulment. The moments of fertilization, gastrulation, neurulation, and birth, are then milestones in the gradual acquisition of what it is to be human. While one may have a particular belief in when the embryo becomes human, it is difficult to justify such a belief solely by science.”⁶
- If the science community is undecided about when life begins, then we must turn to the Bible.
- **Psalm 51:5** “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.”
 - The most often heard interpretation of this passage is that the author, David, sees that he was sinful even at the time he was conceived. If he was not a person, then it follows that he could not have a sinful human nature at that time. A prehuman mass of cells could not have any basis for morality. Only the “humanness” occurring at the time of fertilization would allow David to possess a sinful nature at that time.⁷
- **Jeremiah 1:4-5** “Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, And before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

⁵ Daniel Heimbach, *Fundamental Christian Ethics*, 323.

⁶ <https://answersingenesis.org/sanctity-of-life/when-does-life-begin/>

⁷ Ibid.

- Here God tells Jeremiah that he was set apart before he was born. This would indicate that there was personhood present before Jeremiah’s birth. The verse even indicates that God considered Jeremiah a person and that he was known before he was formed.⁸
- While there are more Scripture references, it is safe to say that the Bible tells us that God considers life to start at the moment of conception. As Christians, we need to think of every fertilized egg as human, having a soul and being a life.
- “By definition, obligation to protect innocent human life begins when human life begins.”⁹

Therapeutic, Eugenic and Elective abortions

- “Therapeutic abortions are those performed to save the life or health of the mother.”¹⁰
- Speaking of ectopic pregnancies “That tragic—but rare—event puts the mother’s life in grave danger. It occurs in 1% to 2% of pregnancies, but is responsible for 4% to 10% of maternal deaths. Untreated, it can cause the fallopian tube to rupture, which ends the life of the baby and likely the mother as well. Treating an ectopic pregnancy is different from having an abortion. Abortion is an intentional, unnatural procedure that kills the baby in the womb. An ectopic procedure, in contrast, attempts to save the life of both mother and unborn child. A number of treatment options are available, but each seeks to separate the embryo from the fallopian tubes.”¹¹
 - The goal of the procedure is not ending the baby’s life but to rather saving it. The first recorded case of a doctor saving the life of a woman from a ruptured ectopic pregnancy was in 1883 and similar cases have continued since then.¹²
- Eugenic and elective abortions are terminate an otherwise healthy child before birth.
- Biblically speaking, there are no reasons for aborting a child in this manner.
 - **Genesis 1:27** “God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”
 - This verse tells us that the ethical value of human life is not derived from humanity itself, but from its Creator, God.¹³

⁸ <https://answersingenesis.org/sanctity-of-life/when-does-life-begin/>

⁹ Heimbach, 330.

¹⁰ Ibid. 323.

¹¹ <https://www.heritage.org/life/commentary/its-time-set-record-straight-ectopic-pregnancies-and-abortion>

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Heimbach, 325.

EUTHANASIA AND DOCTOR ASSISTED SUICIDE

- Euthanasia, sometimes called “mercy killing,” can be a difficult issue. On one hand, we do not want to take a person’s life into our own hands and end it prematurely. On the other hand, we do not want to prolong the process of dying more than necessary—that is, we want to preserve life, but not prolong death. At what point do we simply allow a person to die and take no further action to extend his or her life?¹⁴
- The argument about euthanasia, much like abortion, is about who has the right to say when a life ends and when a life is to be extended.
- I believe it comes down to the 6th commandment... **Exodus 20:13** “You shall not murder.”

What’s happening in our culture today?

- By far, the most progressive country on this issue is Canada.
- This is from their governmental website:¹⁵
 - To be eligible for medical assistance in dying, you must meet all the following criteria.
 - You must: be eligible for health services funded by a province or territory, or the federal government
 - You may also be eligible if you meet your province or territory's minimum period of residence or waiting period.
 - be at least 18 years old and mentally competent
 - This means being capable of making health care decisions for yourself.
 - have a grievous and irremediable medical condition
 - make a voluntary request for medical assistance in dying
 - The request cannot be the result of outside pressure or influence.
 - give informed consent to receive medical assistance in dying
 - Generally, visitors to Canada are not eligible for medical assistance in dying.
- Canada has also sought to allow those who are suffering from mental illnesses to seek death. This has been postponed until March 17th, 2024. They are sorting out what an actual mental illness is.¹⁶
- In the U.S., medical aid in dying is authorized in Oregon, Washington, Montana, Vermont, California, Colorado, D.C., Hawaii, New Jersey, Maine and New Mexico.¹⁷

¹⁴ <https://www.gotquestions.org/euthanasia.html>

¹⁵ <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/health-services-benefits/medical-assistance-dying.html>

¹⁶ <https://www.canada.ca/en/departement-justice/news/2023/03/eligibility-for-medical-assistance-in-dying-for-persons-suffering-solely-from-mental-illness-extended-to-march-17-2024.html>

¹⁷ <https://www.compassionandchoices.org/resource/states-or-territories-where-medical-aid-in-dying-is-authorized>

- Canada accounts for over 10,000 deaths a year, the Netherlands over 7,500, Belgium over 2,500 and the U.S. has over 1,300. The number is rising at alarming rate around the world. ¹⁸

Termination of life support and euthanasia

- When one stops life support measures, it is completely different than terminating a life.
- When life supporting measures are stopped, the “underlying disease or condition can take its natural course, which is the actual cause of death for the patient.”¹⁹
- Stopping life support treatments is not the equivalent to playing God.²⁰
- If God wants someone to live or die, they are going to either live or die...regardless of the life support that they are receiving.
 - **Hebrews 9:27** “And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment...”

A theology of death and dying

- One of the hardest things for people to accept is death. Death is not part of God’s original design and is only here because of sin.
 - **Romans 5:12** “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.”
- But we must also remember that even though it is not part of God’s design, it is part of everyone’s life.
 - **Romans 6:23** “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- If we are to live with a heavenly mindset, then we would know that death is not the end but the beginning of eternity for our loved ones.
 - **Colossians 3:1-2** “Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.”
- For the Christian, death is our graduation from sanctification to glorification. When we try to prolong life here on earth, it may be because we don’t fully understand what awaits us in the next life.

¹⁸ <https://www.statista.com/chart/28130/assisted-suicide-numbers/>

¹⁹ Scott Rae, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, 111.

²⁰ Ibid. 115.

WHAT IS THE UNDERLYING IDEOLOGY BEHIND ALL OF THIS?

- “We live in what is sometimes described as a “culture of death.” Abortion on demand has been practiced for decades. Now some are seriously proposing infanticide. And euthanasia is promoted as a viable means of solving various social and financial problems. *This focus on death as an answer to the world’s problems is a total reversal of the biblical model. Death is an enemy* (1 Corinthians 15:26). Life is a sacred gift from God (Genesis 2:7). When given the choice between life and death, God told Israel to “choose life” (Deuteronomy 30:19). *Euthanasia spurns the gift and embraces the curse.*”²¹
- We cannot shrink away from what is going on around us but be willing to step in and be an instrument for the Lord to use.
- The Christian needs to live in such a way that offers hope to this generation. **How can we offer hope?**
- Concerning abortion, we need to be able to articulate how adoption is not just an option, but it is at the very heart of the gospel message.
 - **Romans 8:15** “For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’”
 - Christians are adopted into the family of God. This is not just a side note but the gospel message. Without someone (Jesus) coming to our rescue (when we were helpless), we would still be in our sin and only awaiting death.
- When one is contemplating euthanasia, it is the same gospel that offers hope.
- This life is not all there is for anyone. Everything that we go through is just temporary on our path to eternity.
- I think that now, more than ever, we need to model the love and compassion of Christ to a very hurting generation. Once again, this is the heart of the gospel.
- **Romans 5:6** “For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.”
 - The idea of God coming to the aid of the helpless is all over the Old Testament.
 - Listen to **Isaiah 25:4** “For You have been a defense for the helpless, A defense for the needy in his distress, A refuge from the storm, a shade from the heat; For the breath of the ruthless Is like a rain storm against a wall.”
- Nobody is without hope who has Christ on their side. We must first believe this truth and then tell others.
- Can you say, like Peter to Jesus in **John 6:68** “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life.”

²¹ <https://www.gotquestions.org/euthanasia.html>