

CLASS NOTES on CHRISTIAN ETHICS

"Christian Ethics is a study of the conduct which should characterize the true believer in Christ in view of statements, principles, and implications of Scripture properly interpreted and rightly divided." --- W. P. Heath

1A. Introduction

1B. The meaning of the word "ethics."

1C. According to the dictionary: "1. A treatise on morals. 2. The science of moral duty; broadly, the science of human character. 3. Moral principles, quality, or practice."

2C. Related words (according to the dictionary):

1D. "Decorum" -- Suggests rigidity or formality in codes of behavior.

2D. "Decency" -- Suggests fitness of one to another.

3D. "Propriety" -- A standard of what is proper or correct -- often implies extreme formality of observance.

4D. "Etiquette" -- The usual word for the code governing manners and conduct, especially in society, and for the conventional observance of such rules.

5D. All of the above words mean a code of rules respecting what is right or fitting, honorable, etc., in conduct or behavior or the character derived from it.

2B. The meaning of the word "moral."

1C. Sometimes it means merely conforming to a standard of what is good or right. It is especially applied to conduct or character.

2C. We usually use this word to apply to serious matters like stealing, murder, and adultery.

3C. It often refers specifically to sexual conduct.

4C. Related words:

1D. "Righteous" -- Guiltlessness or blamelessness.

2D. "Virtuous" -- The possession or manifestation of moral excellence.

3D. "Noble" -- Eminence in virtuousness.

2A. Preliminary considerations.

1B. The necessity of the new birth. John 3:7; 1 Cor. 2:14.

1C. Correct conduct (ethics) cannot make a person a Christian. Rom. 4:4, 5; Eph. 2:8, 9; Titus 3:5 etc.

2C. **Scripturally** correct conduct (**Christian** ethics) is impossible to the natural (unsaved) man. Rom. 8:7, 8.

3C. The implantation of the new nature makes correct conduct possible. Rom. 6:14; Gal. 2:19, 20; Eph. 2:10; Col. 3:10; etc.

2B. Both the **desire** to do what is right and the **ability** to do it are from God. Phil. 2:13; 4:13; Heb. 13:20, 21.

3B. The knowledge of what is right requires a careful study of the written Word of God.

1C. Conscience alone is not enough.

- 1D. A conscience may be:
 - 1E. Weak. 1 Cor. 8:7, 12.
 - 2E. Uninstructed. 1 Cor. 10:27 - 29 (the "strong" believer's conscience knows what the will of God is, the "weak" brother's does not).
 - 3E. Defiled. 1 Cor. 8:7; Titus 1:15.
 - 4E. Evil. Heb. 10:22 (an "evil" conscience is condemning the believer for sins already forgiven).
 - 5E. In need of purging. Heb. 9:14. (the conscience needs to be purged from demanding self righteousness [dead works] to please God).
 - 6E. Seared. 1 Tim. 4:2 (the conscience has become used to evil conduct until it no longer cries out against it. It is insensitive).
- 2D. We must not go **against** conscience, but we need to be **sure** our conscience is instructed in the Word of God and is in subjection to **Him**. Rom. 14:14, 23; 1 Cor. 8:7.
- 2C. A thing is not necessarily right just because we are able to justify it in our own thinking. Judges 17:6; 21:25 and context. Acts 26:9 - 11.
- 3C. Culture is not a sufficient guide for the Christian. Some cultures approve head-hunting, cannibalism, filing of the teeth, mistreatment of women and children, exaltation of materialism, etc.
- 4C. "Religion" is not a safe guide -- not even the "Christian **religion**."
 - 1D. For non-Christians: human sacrifice, killing Christians (see the **religious** zeal of Saul of Tarsus -- carried out in "all good conscience before God" -- Acts 22:23; 23:1) and much more!
 - 2D. As to "Christians" -- confessional, celibacy of priests, rules of dress & diet, etc.
- 5C. Even Scripture is not a safe guide unless it is correctly interpreted and rightly divided. Matt. 5:29, 30; 10:9, 10; Mark 16:18; 1 Cor. 14:39; 16:20; etc.
- 6C. Instruction of the conscience comes through:
 - 1D. A plain statement of Scripture which is dispensationally **TO** us (such as Rom. 12:20; Eph. 4:28; 5:18, 22, 25; etc.).
 - 2D. Principles which can be applied to us (such as Phil. 2:5 with the context).
 - 3D. Examples in Scripture (Acts 15:36 - 40). This passage will be discussed fully later.
 - 4D. Implications from Scripture (closely associated with "3D" above) Phil. 2:21. The implication: that we should seek the things that are Christ's and not the things that are our own.
 - 5D. Application of instructions from other dispensations (related to "2D" above). While the instructions given in Matt. 18:15 - 17 are given to the kingdom church, they can be applied, at least in part, to the church of today -- as long as we do not violate any instruction given to us by Paul.

- 3A.** Statements in Scripture regarding conduct.
- 1B.** The Law of Moses.
- 1C.** The Ten Commandments.
- 1D.** The "moral" commandments. These principles of right and wrong existed long before they were incorporated into the Decalog. They were put into the Law because they were **right**. If available, see the article on "Law and Grace" in the author's book "Help in Hard Places."¹
- 2D.** The one "ceremonial" commandment (the fourth) was **right** because it was **commanded**, the other nine were **commanded** because they were **right**. ("Ceremonial" is a term not used of the Sabbath commandment in Scripture, but is a term chosen by me to indicate the distinction noted here)
- 3D.** All of these commandments, except the Sabbath commandment, are set before us, in amplified form, as principles of conduct under grace. See Appendix number one of the Class Notes on Exodus.
- 2C.** The "judgments" (what was **legally enforced** under Law can often be an indication to us of what would be a **"fair solution"** to problems today).
- 1D.** Ex. 21:28. (Accidental death); 21:29 (gross negligence); 21:35 ("no fault" settlement); 21:36 (negligence); etc.
- 2D.** **Ex. 23:2-a** -- A man is not to get caught up in a "mob" or a "demonstration" and do what he would not do if he thought about it for himself beforehand. **23:2-b** -- A judge is not to yield to the pressure of public opinion -- see Matt. 27:24 - 26; Luke 23:22 - 24). **23:3** -- A judge is not to just "feel sorry" for the accused and let him go. **23:4, 5** -- Don't take out your hatred for your enemy on his animals.
- 3D.** Deut. 19:21 Here is instruction for the **judge** in the case. Compare Matt. 5:38, where the instruction is for the **victim**.
- 4D.** Deut. 23:24, 25 Note the difference between "bringhouse" and stealing. ("Bringhouse" is a custom in the Philippines. Whenever one is guest in a home it is expected they will bring some of the food back to their home for those who had to stay behind.) This is only an example.
- 3C.** The Ceremonial Law. The Ceremonial Law (including the Tabernacle, the priesthood, the sacrificial system, the feast days and Sabbaths, etc.) was only a shadow of the realities we find in Christ (Col. 2:16, 17; Heb. 9:8 - 10; 10:1; etc.).
- 2B.** Help from the poetical books (particularly Proverbs). **See Appendix number one -- "Principles of conduct from Proverbs."**
- 3B.** Some principles from the Prophets.
- 1C.** On religious observances -- Isa. 1:11 - 18.

¹ The book "Help in Hard Places" is out of print at present. It is available on diskette (either "Rich Text Format" or "Microsoft Word") from William P. Heath, 423 Burke Ave., Leavenworth, WA 98826 USA – or Things to Come Mission, 2200 English Ave., Indianapolis, IN 46201-4000, USA.

- 2C. On fasting -- Isa. 58:3 --- 59:2.
- 3C. The "woes" in Isaiah chapter five.
- 1D. 5:8. Lack of privacy -- nowhere to be alone with the Lord.
 - 2D. 5:11. Mis-use of time.
 - 3D. 5:18. Mis-use of energy and zeal.
 - 4D. 5:20. Reversal of values. (Here is a good place to discuss "situational ethics," the idea there are no absolute standards of right and wrong; that everything depends on the circumstances) An example of this today is the present standard being followed in the U.S. -- that to **kill** an unborn child is **right**, while the **chastening** of a child by its parents (even very mild chastening) is "child abuse" and **wrong**.
 - 5D. 5:21. Self righteousness.
 - 6D. 5:22. Exaltation of wickedness. Wicked men and women become the "heroes" and the "stars" for people to imitate, -- their "role models."
- 4C. Lessons from Jonah: The high cost of disobedience, importance of obeying, even when we do not understand (when "God's will" "just doesn't make sense"), & so forth, is just an example.²
- 4B. Some examples from the Gospels.
- 1C. The "Golden Rule" -- Matt. 7:12. One must see things from other people's point of view. Compare Phil. 2:3, 4.
 - 2C. The importance of humility. Contrast Matt. 20:2 with John 13:3 - 5 and notice the lesson at Matt. 20:25 - 28 and John 13:14 - 17.
 - 3C. Paying taxes. See Matt. 22:17 - 21 and compare Romans 13:6, 7.
- 4A. Church related ethics.
- 1B. Relationships between workers (Pastors, Evangelists, Missionaries, Bible Women, etc.)
 - 1C. A brother who needs to be rebuked -- Paul and Peter. Gal. 2:11 - 21. (What Paul said to Peter probably extends through v. 21).
 - 1D. The problem was not false doctrine on Peter's part, but a failure to be **consistent** in walking according to the doctrine. It was hypocrisy.
 - 2D. Paul did not talk behind Peter's back, he faced him with it.
 - 3D. Paul spoke out before the others because they were affected -- they were beginning to side with Peter. Something had to be done **at once!**
 - 4D. He carefully explained his reasons for the rebuke.
 - 5D. Peter did not try to answer him, and defend himself.
 - 6D. Paul did not allow the situation to rob him of his respect and love for Peter (1 Cor. 1:12; 9:5), nor did Peter lose his respect or love for Paul (2 Pet. 3:15, 16).
 - 2C. Workers who cannot work together -- Paul and Barnabas. Acts 15:36 - 41.

² (See the book "A City of Two Tales" by W. P. Heath, published by Grace Publications, Inc. Grand Rapids, Mich.)

together.

- 1D. The trouble was not over doctrine, but over principle (the way to treat Mark).
- 2D. It was a "hot" (sharp) argument -- and they could not agree on a solution.
- 3D. They felt that, under the circumstances, they could not work together.
- 4D. Mistakes they did **not** make:
 - 1E. Barnabas did not try to interfere with Paul's ministry or to take the churches they had established together away from him. Paul evidently was the one who had the backing of the church sending them forth (Acts 15:40).
 - 2E. Paul did not talk against Barnabas, or interfere with his work.
 - 3E. Paul did not lose his respect for Barnabas (1 Cor. 9:6).
 - 4E. Neither one of them took the dispute before others to try to get them to "take their side" in the argument. It was settled between them and not allowed to cause trouble in the churches.
- 5D. **Good** that came out of it, **because of the way it was handled:**
 - 1E. There were now two missionary parties instead of only one.
 - 2E. John Mark learned his lesson (through Paul's severity) but was not discouraged from the ministry (due to the kindness of Barnabas). He turned out well. He wrote the Gospel according to Mark, was highly thought of by Peter (1Pet. 5:13) and proved himself to Paul (Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11; Philemon 24).
 - 3E. Later Paul was able to face the Judaizers, who met him at every turn, without depending on Barnabas -- who evidently was a bit weak here, as indicated in Gal. 2:13.
- 3C. A "rival" worker -- Apollos. Apollos was an effective preacher, eloquent and mighty in the Scriptures (Acts 18:24).
 - 1D. Paul was not jealous of Apollos. When some began to follow Apollos, he did not become angry with him or envious of him, but scolded the people for being followers of men -- whether Paul or Apollos (1 Cor. 1:11 - 13; 3:3, 4; 4:6, 7).
 - 2D. Paul up-held Apollos as a faithful co-laborer (1 Cor. 3:5 - 8; 16:12; Titus 3:13).
- 4C. Training others. Paul and his younger associates (Timothy and Titus particularly).
 - 1D. Timothy
 - 1E. He was evidently Paul's convert, or he looked upon him as a son in the sense that he was training him as he would his own son (1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2).
 - 2E. He was called a "workfellow" (Rom. 16:21).
 - 3E. He sent him on important assignments (1 Cor. 4:17; Phil. 2:19, 23; 1 Thess. 3:2, 6).
 - 4E. Paul recognized his value (Phil. 2:20 - 22).

- 5E.** He recognized his weaknesses and sought to minister to them (1 Cor. 16:10; 2 Tim. 1:4, 6 - 8; 2:3).
- 6E.** He evidently expected Timothy to take his place when he was gone (1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 3:14; 4:5, 6).
- 2D.** Titus
- 1E.** Titus also was, probably, a convert of Paul (Titus 1:4).
- 2E.** There are many references to Titus aside from the book of Titus (2 Cor. 2:13; 7:6, 13, 14; 8:6, 16, 28; 12:18; Gal. 2:1, 3; 2 Tim. 4:10).
- 3D.** Instructions to a young pastor (in First Timothy). The word "pastor" in the NT is "*poimane*" and is translated "shepherd" 17 times. As a verb, it is translated "rule" 4 times. A shepherd must **feed** the flock (1 Pet. 5:2) and **guard** it (John 10:11 - 15, 28).
- E.** War a good warfare (1:18, 19) -- holding **faith** and a **good conscience**.
- 2E.** **Pray** (2:1 - 4).
- 3E.** Be an **example** to the flock (4:7, 8).
- 4E.** **Do not Neglect** the gift that is in you (4:14).
- 5E.** **Meditate** (4:15).
- 6E.** Take heed to **thyself** (4:16).
- 7E.** Take heed to the **doctrine** (4:16).
- 8E.** Keep yourself **pure** (5:22)
- 9E.** **Flee** these things (6:9 - 11).
- 1F.** The desire to be rich (miserliness).
- 2F.** The love of money (a desire to be a "big spender").
- 10E.** Take care of your **body** (5:23).
- 11E.** **Fight** the good fight of faith (6:12 -- and compare 2 Tim. 4:7 where Paul said of himself, "I have fought a good fight").
- 12E.** **Keep the deposit of truth** (6:20).
- 2B.** A Pastor and his Board or Elders
- 1C.** The Elders are individuals. The Greek "elder" means simply "**older**." The more mature in the faith specially, as well as the older in years, are in view (1 Tim. 5:17 - 21).
- 2C.** What to do when the Board (or congregation, for that matter) is in favor of a course of action that you feel is not Scriptural.
- 1D.** Be **sure** what the Bible teaches on the subject. Search the Bible with an open mind.
- 2D.** Be **sure** what the Board or members are saying. Listen and consider.
- 3D.** Pray. Spend **time** "talking it over" with the Lord. Let Him **counsel** with you. Perhaps the problem is not important enough to pursue the matter any further?
- 4D.** Do any necessary **general** teaching which may be needed as a background for a better understanding -- but don't make it too pointed. Don't **preach AT** the Board or members (don't "bomb"

them, as the Filipinos would say).

- 5D. Wait.** Give them time to think about what you have taught (but not time enough for them to **forget** it).
- 6D.** Reconsider the problem.
- 1E.** Freely admit any error on your part. Accept any blame that you really deserve. Pride on your part must not prevent this!
- 2E.** Do not demand admissions of error or apologies on their part. Let the Lord deal with them as He has with you.
- 7D. Wait** again. Take time to come to a decision. Don't "railroad" it or "push it through." Do not use (or misuse) parliamentary procedures just to get your own way in the meeting (or to show them how much you know). They should be used to make a meeting go more smoothly and to prevent anyone from defeating the true will of the majority.
- 8D.** Come to a decision.
- 1E.** If agreement is reached -- end of problem. **BUT** don't gloat over your victory or you may lose it!
- 2E.** If **NOT** ---
- 1F.** Don't lose your temper!
- 2F.** Be understanding and forgiving.
- 3F.** Seek other solutions.
- 1G.** Perhaps they need a different pastor (**but don't use this as a threat to try to force them to let you have your own way!**).
- 2G.** They may have an answer which is just as Scriptural as yours and just as effective or, possibly, even more so.
- 3G.** Possibly (depending on the nature of the problem) it can remain as an "agree to disagree" situation - **IN LOVE**. The matter would be "tabled" indefinitely.
- 3C.** The selection of a pastor
- 1D.** The church's ethics
- 1E.** Do not ask for a "Bible Woman," just because she is easier to support, and then expect her to do the work of a pastor. Her ministries are limited by Scripture, as is recognized by the policy of most sound missionary organizations (such as Things to Come Mission) -- 1 Cor. 14:34; 1 Tim. 2:11 - 14. See "Women's Ministries" by W. P. Heath published in the Philippines by Things to Come Mission.
- 2E.** Do not expect a perfect pastor -- unless you are a perfect church!
- 3E.** Do not expect the pastor to do all the ministry in the barrio or city. He is to lead the congregation in **their** ministry (Eph. 4:11, 12).

- 4E.** Have a plan to support your pastor. He needs to eat and support his family also (1 Cor. 9:7 - 14). Titus 3:14 (Living Bible) says, "For our people must learn to help all who need their assistance, that their lives will be fruitful." See Gal. 6:6 - 10.
- 2D.** The "candidating" pastor's ethics. Here is a good place for class discussion.
- 3B.** Relationships with fellow believers
- 1C.** We should not take advantage of fellow believers in business matters! (1 Tim. 6:1, 2). See how Paul treated both Philemon & Onesimus (Philemon 10 - 19).
- 2C.** No lawsuits! (1 Cor. 6:1 - 8).
- 3C.** Concerning doubtful issues (eating meat is used as an example -- Rom. 14:1 -- 15:3; 1 Cor. 8:1 - 13).
- 1D.** **Forbidding** to eat meat is **condemned** (1 Tim. 4:1 - 6).
- 2D.** Our **right** to eat is **up-held** (Rom. 14:14; Col. 2:16; 1 Tim. 4:3-b - 5).
- 3D.** The **importance** of eating meat **denied** (Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 8:8; Heb. 13:9).
- 4D.** The **harm** of "**demanding our rights**" is pointed out (Rom. 14:15; 1 Cor. 8:9 - 13).
- 5D.** The **basis** upon which one eats is **all-important** (Rom. 14:20-b - 23).
- 6D.** **Paul** (a "strong" brother) sets us an **example** (1 Cor. 8:13).
- 4B.** Relationships with visitors in our church services (1 Cor. 14:23 - 25; James 2:2 - 9; 2 John 10; 3 John 8, 10).
- 5B.** Relationships with those who are outside the church. Here, again, is a good place for class discussion.
- 1C.** In evangelism
- 2C.** In social and business contacts
- 3C.** In "religious controversies"
- 4C.** In relation to government
- 5A.** Some important items in personal life
- 1B.** How to handle anger.
- 1C.** Do what we can to prevent it -- prayer will help (Prov. 14:29; Eph. 4:31; Col. 3:8; Titus 1:7; James 1:19, 20).
- 2C.** Recognize that anger may arise unbidden and unexpected -- & prepare for it (Mk. 3:50; Eph. 4:26). You can't prevent a typhoon, but you can strengthen your house against it -- especially when you are in an area that has typhoons often! "When angry, do not sin" (Eph. 4:26 -- Amplified Bible).
- 3C.** Do not try to justify anger in your life (Col. 3:8; James 1:20). "Righteous indignation" is often an **excuse** for losing your temper. Notice, in Jonah 4:1 - 4, 9 - 11, that: **1.** God is "slow to anger" (4:2). **2.** Jonah is **very angry** (4:1). **3.** God asked if he was justified in his anger (4:4, 9). **4.**

Jonah felt he had good reason to be angry -- that it was "righteous indignation," as we often say (4:9). **5.** God showed Jonah how his anger was not justifiable (4:10, 11). God was thinking of the welfare of 120,000 children while Jonah was thinking only of his own comfort. How often our anger is because we are thinking of our **own interests**.

4C. Do not let anger linger to become a fixed attitude (Eph. 4:26-b).

5C. Do not provoke others to wrath (Eph. 6:4 [regarding children]; Prov. 30:33). Also, "A soft answer turneth away wrath" (Prov. 15:1).

B. What are our "rights" as servants of the Lord? (The following Refs. are from NASB)

1C. "Take care lest this **right** of yours (to eat food that has been sacrificed to an idol before it was sold to you) somehow become a stumbling block to the weak" (1 Cor. 8:9 -- margin).

2C. A right to eat and drink (1 Cor. 9:4).

3C. A right to marry (1 Cor. 9:5).

4C. A right to a "full time" ministry, fully supported by the church (1 Cor. 9:6 - 14).

5C. The right to **not make full use of our "rights" -- for the sake of the gospel** (1 Cor. 9:15 - 18).

6C. Our "Rights" must be balanced against our responsibility. The whole ninth chapter of First Corinthians (in the NASB -- where the word "power" is consistently translated "right") makes this very clear.

3B. A Christian should not take his brother to court even if he defrauds (cheats) him (1 Cor. 6:1 - 7). **But**, as for the other believer, he should not defraud his brother (or anyone else for that matter) in the first place! (1 Cor. 6:8).

4B. For discussion and / or teaching:

1C. How to handle situations where someone "loses face."

2C. How to take a scolding -- whether deserved or not.

3C. How to relate to authority.

6A. Ethics in other areas of life.

1B. Home relationships.

1C. With parents (Eph. 6:1 - 3; etc.).

2C. With children (Eph. 6:4; etc.).

3C. With brothers and sisters, discuss this in class..

4C. How to conduct a courtship in such a way that you do not destroy the relationship you are trying to establish -- or cause others to stumble. What courting customs in your culture are Scriptural? What is there in your culture that needs to be changed to fit with Scripture?

2B. School. Consideration of others on campus, respect for teachers, etc.

3B. Work -- relationship to your "boss" (Eph. 6:5 - 8; Titus 2:9, 10 ["purloining" means stealing from your boss]; etc.).

4B. Neighbors.

--- William P Heath

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