

CHRISTIAN ETHICS

Int.

1. Aim: To discuss ethics for Christians in today's world - especially Situation Ethics.

2. Tit. 2:12 "Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;" [wrong - right]
 - a. One of the leading problems facing the church today is ethics and morals
 - b. We must study and learn what God tells us about right and wrong.

3. Definition of Ethics Ethos - Greek - habit or custom
 - a. Morals - what habits ought to be done and ought not to be done
 - b. Animals do not have a moral nature and cannot determine right from wrong.
 - c. Man attempts to decide the rightness or wrongness of behavior. He does this because of conscience. The conscience compares human behavior to the moral code!!
 - d. Those things that we do that are right or wrong in human conduct cause us to have a good conscience. If we do those things which are bad we will have a bad conscience.
 - e. Conscience is not the standard for ethics, but our monitor to determine if we are following the standard.

4. Can there be any ethics without God?
 - a. A book has been written that is entitled: "Ethics without God"
 - b. Absurd ! If there is no God, then anything is permitted. If there is no God, then there is no value and nothing is any better or any worse than any other thing.

- c. If there is no God then it is no worse for the Nazis to have murdered six million Jewish men, women and children than it would have been for them to have killed six million cockroaches, or to have chopped down six million trees, or to have crushed six million rocks.¹
 - d. Because if we are all just matter and there is no God, then nothing is really right or wrong !
5. But we can know:
- a. That God does exist - Ps. 19:1-5 - the heavens declare the glory of God.
 - b. That the Bible is his word
 - c. That Jesus Christ is His son
 - d. That in order to be saved we must believe in, love and obey Jesus Christ as the Son of God
 - e. Therefore since God exists and we have his word we do have a standard of right and wrong.
6. We can learn the truth about Christian ethics.
- a. Jn. 8:32 - truth is attainable
 - b. The Bible is our standard for Christian morals
 - c. The standard is not:
 - (1) What I like or other people like
 - (2) What everybody else is doing - the crowd does not make it right
 - d. All men are subject to God's laws or ethics
7. We will discuss the subject of Situation ethics in the lesson today.

¹Spiritual Sword - Vol. 9 Number 4 July 1978 Editorial by T.B. Warren

Discussion

I. ETHICS DEFINED

- A. There are 3 schools of thought about human moral responsibility:²
1. First there is **Nihilism** [Latin word that means “nothing”]
 - a. They say that there is no God, therefore anything one wishes to do is permitted.
 - b. There are no rules for human conduct - every person is a law unto himself
 2. Second there is **relativism**
 - a. This theory contends that all conduct is relative to the circumstance
 - b. Each individual must decide what is moral or immoral in a given situation
 - c. Every man is his own judge of the matter
 3. Third there is **absolutism**
 - a. This idea affirms that there is an absolute, objective standard of right and wrong
 - b. This code of moral conduct is set forth in the Bible.
- B. We will discuss part 2 relativism or “situation ethics” - two categories....
1. Atheistic situationists - they reject the Bible as having any bearing on morality
 2. Religious situationists - allege that the Bible endorses this code of action
 3. We will look at this area of religious situation ethics:

² Wayne Jackson “A Critical Look at Situation Ethics” Mar. 1, 1999 Christian Courier

C. The “new morality” is another way to describe situation ethics

1. A system of ethics devised by man - Popular practice by many living today
2. Book by Joseph Fletcher “Situation Ethics” - 1966
 - a. He was a teacher at an Episcopal seminary in the 1960's
 - (1) While teaching he renounced his belief in God and declared himself a secular humanist.
 - (2) He did not resign his teaching or preaching but continued to teach his ideas
 - (3) In 1966 he published a book called “Situation Ethics”
 - b. This book with it's teachings has changed the way that many people live

D. Definition of term “Situation Ethics” as taught by Joseph F. Fletcher and others

1. Moral decisions cannot be made on the basis that some things are always right and other things are always wrong.
2. Each moral decision is made in each specific situation and the guideline is to always do the “loving” thing, rather than follow rigid rules derived from Divine revelation.
3. There can be no absolutes as each situation has the potential to bring about exceptions to the rule.
4. “Doing the Loving Thing” has come to mean “do your own thing”.
5. Before he died, Joseph Fletcher is said to have deplored the sleaze and immorality in our society. He died in 1991 and very few noticed his death.

E. An example

1. The Bible teaches us that adultery is wrong - Rom. 13:9-10
2. But Situation Ethics or the New Morality says that in some cases it might be the loving thing to do and would not be wrong.
3. Consider this example:
 - a. A young woman, jilted by her boy friend, is in a state of great depression. A married man, with whom she works, decides to have "an affair" with her in order to comfort her. Some, like Fletcher, would argue that what he did might well have been a noble deed, for the man acted out of concern for his friend.
What a perverted viewpoint!
 - b. Here is the rest of the story. The man's wife learned of his adulterous adventure, could not cope with the trauma, and eventually committed suicide. One of his sons, disillusioned by the immorality of his father and the death of his mother, began a life of crime, and finally was imprisoned for murder. Another son became a drunkard and was killed in an automobile accident that also claimed the lives of a mother and her two children.
 - c. Now, who will contend that that initial act of infidelity was the "loving" thing to do?

II. PROBLEMS WITH SITUATION ETHICS

- A. The laws of adultery, lying and stealing are not always to be observed if situation ethics is true.
1. People are not wanting to follow any set of rules
 2. A person in college might reason: "Which is the greater evil - to cheat, or to flunk out of college?"
- B. If love is best served by adultery, lying or stealing then go ahead. But who decides what is the loving thing to do? Each individual in each circumstance.
- C. The situation is to determine what is right or wrong - according to their view
- D. What is wrong with this ?
1. Destroys all respect for the Bible ! II Tim. 3:16-17
 - a. Situation Ethics sets aside the Bible as the final authority - instead of saying Thy will be done we say "My will be done" I am the authority not God !
 - b. According to them the Bible would read:³
 - (1) "Thou shalt not commit adultery, ordinarily" Rom. 13:9
 - (2) "Thou shalt not steal, ordinarily" - Thou shalt not murder, ordinarily"
 - (3) Unless it is the loving thing to do!
 2. It makes you choose either law or love
 - a. Situation ethics says you cannot have both law and love
 - (1) Jesus says "If you love me, keep my commandments" Jn. 14:15
 - (2) Situation Ethics says if you love me, set aside my commandments.
 - (3) According to the Bible love is defined by keeping the will of God -
1 Jn. 5:3

³Spiritual Sword Vol. 9 # 4 July 1978 p. 3 "Situation Ethics" by David Lipe

- b. Love is described in the Bible as being the summary of the law
 - (1) Mt.22:37-40 & Rom. 13:9
 - (2) Love God - Love neighbour
 - (3) On these two hang all the law and the prophets
- 3. Man becomes his own god
 - a. The Bible is not the rule or standard - Every man becomes a law unto himself
 - b. Our feelings at the time of every situation becomes the standard of morality

Conclusion

1. Love does not make wrong become right
 - a. Do murder, lying, adultery, cheating and stealing become "good acts" just because someone commits them in the name of love?
 - b. Of course not !!! And it is not done with love !!!
2. But real love will keep us from doing wrong.⁴
3. Jesus said we should love our neighbor as we love ourselves - Lk. 10:27
 - a. He also taught "And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise." Lk. 6:31
 - b. This is the golden rule - this is the application of real love
4. Paul says that Love does not behave itself unseemly - I Cor. 13:5
 - a. Love does not conduct itself improperly
 - b. "Love worketh no ill to his neighbor" Rom. 13:10
5. Love does not lead to wrong doing, but always to that which is right.

⁴ WWW.BIBLE.CA/s-situation-ethics.htm Steve Rudd

6. The Bible teaches us that under all situations we should do right.
7. Ps. 119:11
8. No situation has ever, or can ever, make doing wrong right!!
9. What God says is right, is right and what God says is wrong, is wrong.
10. God knows better than we, and let Him make the decisions !
11. Tit.2:10-11 Denying = refuse, reject

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