

Bible Study: Christian Ethics

Part 1: How Christians Make Decisions

1. The first step of Christian decision-making is a right relationship with God through faith in Jesus (MOTIVE).

Galatians 5:6 “The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.”

John 15:5 “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

Hebrews 11:6 “And without faith it is impossible to please God.”

- **When your heart is right with God, you look to his law to direct your love and thanks (LAW).**

Romans 14:23b “Everything that does not come from faith (the conviction that your conscience is in line with the Bible) is sin.”

John 14:15,21a “If you love me, keep my commands... Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me.”

Psalms 119:32 “I run in the path of your commands, for you have broadened my understanding.”

Ephesians 2:10a “We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works.”

- **What do we mean, “Love has a definition”?**

See Mark 12:29-34; Romans 13:8-10

What’s wrong with the maxim, “Let your conscience be your guide”? How can we know whether or not our conscience conforms to God’s will?

How can you know what is “adiaphora” unless you know what doctrine is? How can you know what God leaves to your discretion unless you know what he demands for himself?

What essential activity in the Christian’s daily life do all of the above questions point to?

- **When God’s law offers no specific rule for our action, we decide on the basis of what best glorifies God and serves our neighbor (GOAL).**
- **Above all we seek to glorify God (the glory of God is the *summum bonum*, or ultimate of Christian ethics).**

Matthew 5:16 “In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

Matthew 22:37,38 “Jesus replied, ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment.”

Colossians 3:17 “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

1 Thessalonians 5:21,22 “but test them all; hold on to what is good. Reject every kind of evil.”

1 Corinthians 10:23,24 “‘I have the right to do anything,’ you say—but not everything is beneficial. ‘I have the right to do anything’—but not everything is constructive. No one should seek their own good, but the good of others.”

What does this mean to “slippery slope” ethics, living on the edge?

- **We also glorify God when we seek unselfishly to serve our neighbor.**

Philippians 2:3-5 “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:”

Galatians 5:13,14 “You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

Galatians 6:2 “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”

Romans 13:10 “Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.”

How does the situation or the desired outcome fit into Christian decision-making? Give some examples of the end justifying the means in Christian decision-making? What about at the beginning of life? End of life?

What causes confusion among Christians when they watch each other's decision-making process? Why may this often be judgmental?

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Bible Study: Christian Ethics

Part 2: Sexual Ethics

1. Our human sexuality is a good gift from a loving God.

- God created human sexuality.

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

- God proclaimed our human sexuality very good.

Genesis 1:31a “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.”

- God commanded us to express our sexuality.

Genesis 1:28a “God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.’”

- God’s perfect creatures were not ashamed of their sexuality.

Genesis 2:25 “Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.”

2. God tells us how to use our sexuality with his blessing.

- God blesses the practice of sexual intimacy inside marriage.

Genesis 2:24 “That is why (*that is, to get married*) 1] a man leaves his father and mother 2] and is united to his wife, 3] and they become one flesh.”

Genesis 1:28a “God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number;’”

Proverbs 18:22 “He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the LORD.”

- God curses every use of sex outside of marriage.

Hebrews 13:4 “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.”

1 Corinthians 6:16 “Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, ‘The two will become one flesh.’”

1 Corinthians 6:9,10 “Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men... will inherit the kingdom of God.” (See **Leviticus 18**).

3. To use our sexuality in ways for which God did not create and bless it does great harm to God, ourselves, and others.

All sex outside marriage lacks God’s command and blessing and will incur his curse. (fornication = any sexual contact outside of marriage, including premarital sex, prostitution, and unfaithfulness; adultery = sexual contact with any but your spouse; pederasty = sexual contact with a child).

1 Corinthians 6:9,10 “Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders... will inherit the kingdom of God.”

Romans 13:13 “Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery.”

2 Corinthians 12:21b “...I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual sin and debauchery in which they have indulged.”

Galatians 5:19,21b “The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

Ephesians 5:3 “But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking.”

Sexual contact with anyone or anything other than the opposite sex is doubly degrading and openly invites God’s retribution (homosexuality is contact with the same sex; bestiality is sexual contact with animals).

Leviticus 18:22 “Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman; that is detestable.”

Leviticus 18:23a “Do not have sexual relations with an animal and defile yourself with it.”

Deuteronomy 27:21 “Cursed is anyone who has sexual relations with any animal.”

Romans 1:24,26,27 “Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.”

Yet God does not want us to seek sexual purity out of fear of punishment. Jesus’ blood covers even the worst sexual sins. Our motive for sexual purity is thanksgiving for forgiveness and the presence of the Holy Spirit in our bodies as his temple.

Romans 13:14 “Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.”

1 Corinthians 6:9,11 [Sexually immoral, adulterers, men who have sex with men...] “That is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

1 Corinthians 6:18-20 “Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside their body, but whoever sins sexually sins against their own body. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.”

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Part 3: Ethics at the End of Life

1. The believer entrusts the end of his life to God.

Genesis 3:19c [God said to Adam:] “For dust you are and to dust you will return.”

Psalms 90:2b,3,5a “... from everlasting to everlasting you are God. You turn people back to dust, saying, ‘Return to dust, you mortals.’ Yet, you sweep people away in the sleep of death.”

1 Samuel 2:6 “The LORD brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up.”

Psalms 31:15a “My times are in your hands.”

Psalms 139:16b “...all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”

Acts 17:26 “From one man he made all nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.”

God specifies the exact means (conception) by which he begins life. Thus, he also indicates the exact time at which he begins human life. God says that the end of life is also within his control, but he does not specify the means or the time he will make it happen. Therefore, in addition to trusting that God ends life, the Christian must apply other ethical principles to end-of-life decisions.

2. Toward the end of life, we have grown to trust that suffering has a God-pleasing purpose.

Hebrews 12:5-7 “My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as his son.”

Romans 8:18 “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”

Romans 5:3 “...we also glory in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.”

John 16:33 [Jesus said,] “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

2 Corinthians 12:8,9,10b “Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away [my thorn in the flesh] from me. But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in [your] weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me... For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Maintaining life is a higher goal than avoiding suffering. **Shortening a patient’s time of suffering also shortens his time of grace.** To ease or comfort suffering in order to extend life and serve our neighbor, of course, is commanded by God. BUT, to hasten or cause death (which God reserves for his control) in order to avoid suffering (which God allows for his good purposes) is doubly sinful. God uses our last bitter hours to draw us to himself and to the promises of his Word, so that we will not die in smug self-reliance. Since life is God’s jurisdiction, humans may not cause death as a “painkiller.”

3. We believe that the eternal welfare of the soul is more important than the short-term good of the body.

1 Corinthians 4:17,18 “For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”

Matthew 10:28 “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”

3 John 1:2 “Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well.”

When we prepare for our hospital visit, we will give more attention to what we will share from the Word and how we will phrase our prayers with our loved ones than anguishing about which medical procedure is more godly. Putting these principles into practice at critical times, we might say: **When death is imminent, we may withdraw any and all medications and treatments except those which relieve pain. Generally, we may conclude that death is imminent when two or more medical practitioners agree that our loved one, regardless of treatment, will not live for more than a day or two. God does not expect us to be fortune tellers. As good stewards, we can only use the knowledge and resources that are known and available to us when we make our decision. We may make wrong decisions. If we are in doubt, we should err on the side of preserving God’s gift of life rather than hastening death.**

4. A spiritual person will recognize sinful motives in end-of-life decision-making.

- **Greed:** health care at all levels is expensive: inheritances can be spent in days.

Luke 10:34,35 “He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’”

1 Timothy 6:9,10 “People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”

- **Selfishness:** the desire to be relieved of the duty of serving the dying.

Galatians 6:9,10 “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”

- **Unspirituality:** neglecting to witness to and pray for our loved ones.

1 Peter 3:15b “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.”

5. Trusting in these principles, we confidently make decisions at the end of life, trusting that our Christian ethic is the only ethic that offers forgiveness.

Matthew 6:12 “And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”

Daniel 9:9 “The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him;”

Psalms 130:4 “But with you there is forgiveness; so that you can, with reverence, serve you. therefore you are feared.”

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