

A Biblical Picture of Christian Ethics

Two Parts

Worldview Camp – Pine Haven Christian Assembly
Resource Webpage: <https://richknopp.com/worldviewcamp25/>

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Introduction

- A. Survey on moral absolutes. (Use the following symbol key to respond to items on screen.)

AW = Absolutely Wrong	MI: Morally Inexpedient
GW = Generally Wrong	MA = Morally Acceptable

- B. Cultural stats

1. Right/Wrong do NOT change.
2. Is moral truth “absolute” or “relative”?
3. Is lying morally wrong?

- C. Perceptions of morality.

- D. Christian Ethics.

1. It is based on a _____ **TRANSCENDENT** _____ God.
2. It is _____ **REVEALED** _____ by God
 - a. Natural revelation
 - b. Special revelation
3. It is grounded on God’s unchanging _____ **CHARACTER** _____ as perfectly good.
4. It defends moral _____ **ABSOLUTES** _____.

- E. The four components of Christian ethics:

1. The _____ **ACTIONS** _____
2. The _____ **AGENT** _____
3. The _____ **CONSEQUENCES** _____
4. The _____ **SITUATION** _____

I. Actions

- A. Old Testament commandments

1. Total commandments: _____ **613** _____
2. The “most important” (Deut. 6:4; Matt. 22:35-39; Mark 12:28-31; Luke 10:25-28).
3. The “least important” (Deut. 22:6).
4. Categories of commands
 - a. Moral
 - b. Judicial (Ex. 21-22; Num. 35; Lev. 25)
 - c. Ceremonial (Lev. 1:1-9; Lev. 12:1-8; Ex. 29:1-9; Ex. 25-31)

B. New Testament

1. Categories of commands
 - a. Ceremonial (Col. 2:13-17; Heb. 9-10)
 - b. Legal (Rom. 13:1-7)
 - c. Moral
2. Actions that can prevent one from inheriting the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:3-5; Col. 3:5-6).

II. The Agent

- A. The one DOING the action.
- B. The notion of MORAL WORTH: How God evaluates the morality of our actions.
 1. The MOTIVE of our action.
 - a. Matt. 6:1
 - b. Matt. 5:5 "When you pray ..."
 - c. Matt. 5:16 "When you fast ..."
 - d. Matt. 23:5
 2. One's own CONSCIENCE (Rom. 14:14,23)
 3. A morally good ACT can be WRONG:
 - a. **IF** it is done with the wrong MOTIVE.
 - b. **IF** it violates one's OWN CONSCIENCE.

III. The Consequences

- A. This is NOT utilitarianism.
 1. Utilitarianism: The "right" action is ALWAYS what produces the greatest happiness to the greatest number.
 2. BUT, a biblical ethic only recognizes that consequences are SOMETIMES critical in determining what is "right" or "wrong."
- B. Three main biblical considerations:
 1. The EDIFICATION principle (1 Cor. 10:23).
 2. The conscience of OTHERS (1 Cor. 8:11-12).
 3. The STUMBLING principle (Rom. 14:21; 1 Cor. 8:13).
- C. A morally GOOD ACT can be WRONG:
 1. IF it is a STUMBLING block to others.
 2. IF it makes someone else violate their CONSCIENCE.

IV. The Situation

- A. This is NOT “situation ethics.”
 - 1. Situation ethics claims that right/wrong ALWAYS and ONLY depends on the situation.
 - 2. BUT, a biblical ethic recognizes that the situation is *SOMETIMES* critical in determining what is “right” or “wrong.”
- B. Christian ethics:
 - 1. Accepts MULTIPLE moral absolutes.
 - 2. Grants that there may be legitimately “CONFLICTING” moral absolutes—when a situation *requires* us to choose *between* moral absolutes.
 - 3. Acknowledges that some moral obligations are WEIGHTIER than others (Matt. 22:38; Matt. 23:3).
- C. Perceptions of “SIN”:
 - 1. All are EQUAL (James 2:10).
 - 2. BUT, from another standpoint, this is biblically problematic.
- D. The Bible clearly indicates that some sins are WORSE than others.
 - 1. “Greater” sin (Jn. 19:11).
 - 2. “Sin leading to death” and “sin not leading to death” (1 Jn. 5:16-17).
 - 3. Sin that demands disassociation (1 Cor. 5:9-13).
 - 4. Forgivable and “unforgivable” sin (Mk. 3:28-29; Heb. 6:4-6).
 - 5. More severe punishment for some sin (Heb. 10:29; Mk. 12:38-40).
 - 6. Punishment “with many blows” and “with few blows” (Lk. 12:47-48).
 - 7. Judgment will be “more bearable” for some than others (Matt. 11:21-24).
- E. Does any situation FORCE us to choose between conflicting moral absolutes?
- F. If so, what guidance does the Bible provide?
 - 1. Choose the WEIGHTIER moral obligation.
 - 2. E.g., Obey God over GOVERNMENT (Daniel 3-6; Acts 4).
 - 3. Save innocent life over TRUTH telling (Rahab in Joshua 2; the Hebrew midwives in Exodus 1).

EXTRA CREDIT SECTION ON COMPETING FORMS OF CHRISTIAN ABSOLUTISM:¹

- G. Competing forms of Christian absolutism.
 - 1. Unqualified Absolutism
 - a. No unavoidable moral conflicts are NOT POSSIBLE.
 - b. Trust God to get you out of it.
 - c. If you violate a command, it is SINFUL.
 - 2. Qualified Absolutism
 - a. Unavoidable moral conflicts are POSSIBLE.
 - b. Do the “lesser evil.”
 - c. Even if you do the “lesser evil,” it is still SIN.
 - 3. Graded Absolutism
 - a. Unavoidable moral conflicts are POSSIBLE.
 - b. Do the “greater good.”
 - c. If you do the “greater good,” it is NOT SIN.

¹ Advanced students can see Richard A. Knopp, “Moral Absolutes and Moral Worth: A Proposal for Christian Ethics Inspired by Norman Geisler,” in *I Am Put Here for the Defense of the Gospel*, ed. Terry L. Miethe, 317-345.