

**A Frank and Challenging Approach to enable  
the Christian Young Person to Evaluate his or  
Her Ethics!**

**This paper is part of a teaching package used to teach Youth  
Ministry Students about Christian Ethical Dialogue in the light of the  
difficult questions young people are asking youth leaders today!**

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## **Biblical Christian Ethics for Year 3 BTh students**

It is the purpose of this brief précis concerning Christian ethics to:

[1] Give a theological framework for Christian ethics.

[2] To give a “missional” framework for the outworking of ethics in Christian mission, evangelism, ecclesiology and catechesis.

[3] To raise specific issues that relate to post modern culture and the ethical life of Christians’.

### **[1 & 2] Theological Framework Vs “Missional” Framework**

#### **[A] Definition of terms**

- i. Ethics may be defined as a systematically thought through system of beliefs about moral behaviours which it is believed to be of value for personal protection, integrity and right doing.
- ii. David Clyde Jones defines ethics as:

“.....human conduct is subject to a threefold evaluation from a moral point of view. First, the end the agent seeks to realize must be good, intrinsically worthy of human pursuit. Second, the motive of the agent must also be good, so that the end is sought because it is worthwhile, the mark of a good character. Third, the means of the end must be good, conforming to the standard of what is right, since neither a good end nor a good motive is compatible with a bad means. For conduct morally praiseworthy it must be good in all three respects, not least because end, motive, and means are not finally separable.”<sup>1</sup>
- iii. John Stott starts his discussion of ethics in a different way; more as a question than a definition. In Stott’s view it seems that ethics are to be deduced from biblical principle as they relate to specific situations, or general questions of moral life. He particularly questions the need to question our ethical duty but seems to see it as inseparable from mission and evangelism. He writes:

“It is exceedingly strange that any followers of Jesus Christ should ever have needed to ask whether social involvement was their concern, and that controversy should have blown up over the relationship between evangelism and social responsibility. For it is evident that in his public ministry Jesus both ‘went about...teaching...and preaching’ [Matt.4:9,35 RSV] and ‘went about doing good and healing’ [Acts 10:38 RSV]. In consequence, ‘evangelism and social concern have been intimately related to one another throughout the history of the

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<sup>1</sup> Jones, David Clyde, Biblical Christian Ethics, Baker Books, USA, 1994. Page 11.

church.....Christian people have often engaged in both activities quite unselfconsciously, without feeling any need to define what they were doing or why'.<sup>2</sup>

- iv. Perhaps Jones' further comments on what constitute Christian ethics may further clarify the question of ethics? He writes:

“From a biblical point of view, the question of criteria for goals, persons, and practices comes down to this: What is God calling us to be and to do? Since God's salvation call is not bare invitation but a manifestation of his sovereignty and power, the question is more fully: What is God summoning and enabling us, his redeemed people, to be and to do?”<sup>3</sup>

- v. Perhaps one of the most comprehensive definitions of a Christian derived ethic is given in principle by the Apostle Paul. Her writes:

“I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Key Questions:**

[1] How do you define Christian ethics? Take 10 minutes to write your own definition.

[2] What are the key points concerning ethics which you have drawn from the above definitions? List them.

### **[B] Eschatological Salvation and ethics**

- i. Paul's command “not” to “be conformed to this world but transformed”, as mentioned above, highlights the eschatological two world dualism of New Testament theology. The word “world” is taken to mean those practices and beliefs which are evil and against God's kingdom and reign. There is the “prince of the power of the air who is now at work in the sons of disobedience” [Eph. 2:2]. This is of course Satan [Rev. 12:18]. His so called kingdom is a usurped claim on God's perfect created order. He primarily reigns in peoples' lives using deception – and directly opposing truth about God, about salvation offered in Christ and the power of the new life which Jesus comes to live in us by the reign of his Spirit. This reign is his rule of love in our hearts [Col. 3:15]. The truth will set us free [John 8:32]. So what is that truth?

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<sup>2</sup> Stott, John, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, Marshalls, UK, 1984. Page 2.

<sup>3</sup> Op Cit, Page 11.

<sup>4</sup> Romans 12:1,2 RSV

- ii. It is that Christ has already defeated the enemy by his death, resurrection and ascension. By his death he has forgiven us for all sin for all time by taking the penalty for it on himself [Gal. 2:20; Rom. 6:1-8; 6:23]. By his resurrection he has defeated death, and delivered a new life free from the power of sin by the indwelling Holy Spirit. By his ascension we are now located by his side in heavenly places – above all rule and authority and every name that is named [Eph. 2:6]. Hence we share in that victory – the gates of hell cannot prevail against the Christian as long as he or she allows him or herself to live in the awareness that they are now creatures who belong to the new lifestyle of the future age [John 5:24, 10:27 – 30 and Rom 6:1-8].
- iii. This is a new self awareness for the Christian which is termed eschatological salvation. Jesus atonement has already positioned us securely in God’s kingdom of grace [Rom. 6:23; 8:30 – 34]. So in a kind of divine time warp we have been securely placed with our individual names written in the Lambs book of life since “before the foundation of the world.” [Rev. 13:8, Eph. 1:3]. We have passed over from spiritual death to eternal security [John 5:24 and Rom. 6:23]. We are in God’s spiritual time machine which has already put us securely in his **now and not yet kingdom**. We are no longer to see ourselves as conformers to the values of this fallen world, but to claim the victory of the future world we are already part of in the Spirit [Eph. 2:6 and Matt. 28:19]. However, we are living between times. The final consummation of the physical establishment of the kingdom of God, and the eradication of sin and sinners, has not yet come. So we live in the world for a purpose.
- iv. This purpose is expressed in the first three petitions of the Lord’s Prayer; with the threefold enabling requests which it is God’s will to start to fulfil in this between times period. Firstly, to position our hearts with the Father’s heart in our desires to be like him “Our Father who art in heaven” [Matt. 6:9]. Father ‘Abba’ or ‘daddy’ is how God reveals himself and it is how he wants us to speak to him and visualise him. He is a tender Father a Dad. We model ourselves on this manifestation of who he is. Secondly, we pray “Your kingdom come” or “Your reign of mercy and justice be established” [Matt. 6:10]. While we live in this world we carry on the work that Jesus began by following in the powerful energising steps of Jesus’ Spirit as we continue what he started [Acts 1:1,8 & 16:8-10]. We now continue to be Jesus hands of mercy, justice, healing and ethical behaviour by setting that example to the world; as we continue to follow in his footsteps and as he does even greater works than ever before through the body of Christ by his Spirit [John 14:12 & 1 Cor. 12]. Jesus extended the reign of God by his words of life and his deeds of deliverance taking back every sphere of life that the enemy had stolen from mankind; this he did in his ministry, and continues to do in our lives by his Spirit [Eph. 6:10 - 20]. He was involved in a door to door battle as he delivered people from this age/world to the new age/new world of God’s present and future kingdom. Hence we now live the life of the future in the present. Being God’s practical living ethical standard as the body of Christ [1 Cor. 12]. We are his face, his hands, and his feet in this world. So thirdly, the Lord teaches us to pray: “Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” [Matt. 6:10]. What this tells us is that God wants Christian ethics to be tied up

with Christian mission – which is Christ’s mission to deliver all men and women firstly, from sin damaged minds, emotions and practices [for our minds are being renewed by the Spirit 1 Cor. 2:16], and secondly, to be socially concerned in building the kingdom of God in people’s lives here today.

- v. For the command to preach the whole gospel into the whole world [Matt.24:14], is linked in Matthean thought with making disciples and teaching all nations baptising them in the name of the Trinity [Matt. 28:19,20]. And if we are to teach then followers come to be like their master by his indwelling Spirit living, and walking as he did and still does through us his individual believers today [1 John 1:7].
- vi. The Kingdom of God is firstly, to become resident within us [Luke. 17:20,21], and when all have had a chance to reach repentance [2 Peter 3:9], and to really to have had the chance to choose Jesus, and his kingdom; with its values lived out by his Spirit living in us, then the final physical kingdom will be set up [2 Peter 3:10].
- vii. Hence the Kingdom of God is directly related to ethics and the proclamation of the liberty we now have as we grow fruits of the Spirit [Gal. 5:22] within us by the Spirit of Jesus enabling. We cannot separate ethics from eschatological salvation. The life of Jesus was a demonstration of God’s reign driving out the influence of sin, as well as its power by the power of the cross [1 Cor. 1:18].
- viii. The youth minister as a partaker in eschatological salvation is involved in the warfare of the Spirit of Jesus as he reclaims territory from the enemy; by proclaiming the reign of Jesus over every system of government and earthly force or institution which sets itself up against King Jesus. The first task of mission is the liberation of the individual from Satan’s hold. True ethics are kingdom ethics where Jesus is called upon by name to practically over rule any earthly system which sets itself up against him. Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth now [Mat. 28:19]. As partakers “in Christ” by saving Grace and faith [Ephesians 2:8-10] we are to walk in the good works which God has already preordained for us to walk in; claiming his authority already delivered to us to remove obstacles to his mercy and justice in the “missional” process and context [Matt. 16:19].
- ix. Christian ethics may be defined as delivering the gospel of grace to liberate people to live for Christ and his kingdom values right now. They will not become changed all at once, but they need to understand that nothing can get in the way of it if they realise that “apart from Jesus they can do nothing” [John 15:5]. Stated positively with Jesus nothing cannot be done to liberate people here and now to live for God’s kingdom and his values; as we live the life of the future in our conscious minds, here and now, subjecting all of our thoughts to Christ and his power to transform them into his likeness [2 Corinthians 3].
- x. Eschatological salvation makes sense of the prime motivation of Christian ethics which are to be involved in each individual believer’s life as they follow the path that God has preordained for them to walk in [Eph. 2:10]. This walking is a cooperative process as we do what Jesus did by asking him to show us what he wants us to do for him that day [John 5:19; 16:12]. This is the new radical ethic of the new Christian life which is now lived

not by planning my agenda, but by following Christ's agenda as it is revealed to me for that day. I do not get weighed down fighting battles, or doing others things, which God does not want me to do for him that day, or indeed in the context of the broader ministry he has given me. A key question is to ask God what don't you want me to do today which others or situations may have pushed into the centre of your minds eye?

- xi. Hence we need to have a living relationship with God by our spirits agreeing with Christ's Spirit that we are children of God [Rom 8:14-16]. We need to hear God's voice communicating with us each day showing us the positive path he wants us to walk for him. When we walk in that path then we are really living in his enabling; because then it becomes true that he delivers all the keys of the kingdom relating to our part in his plan, which will open up the supply of his unlimited power to act through us as we walk by the Spirit in our specific role for a day or season [John 14:12]. Now that is really what Christian ethics is all about! We cannot be more highly challenged than by all of this.

Thank you Jesus for revealing this to me today! Thank you that you want to flow through us all [John 7:38,39]. Help me to be open to that flow, and to trustingly submit my life, and my will, to go cooperatively where you show. Please remove any sinful high minded obstacle in me so that I may completely live for you. In Jesus name Amen.

### **Questions:**

- [1] What are the key principles of the ethics of the Kingdom of Grace?  
[2] To what extent is it practical to consider that we should live by a new Kingdom ethic?  
[3] What are the key features of Eschatological salvation? How do these features help you to understand how we are to relate to defining ethics whilst we are still in this present world order?

### **[C] Four Keys for hearing the voice of God**

The ethical life is guided and empowered by living "in Christ" submitted to his "reign and rule of grace, mercy and justice"; and by only doing what he is wanting me to do for him as I walk in his footsteps and plan for my life - which he has given me gifts and talents to do for him [Jer. 1:4, 1 Cor. 12, Eph. 2:8-10]. We are to live by grace, which means we do not live out of our resources [becoming humanists] to act, but out of the flow of his resources, which come to us by the new nature he has delivered to us once for all [Col. 3:10 – see on the aorist in the Greek for this interpretation]. We need to start to live out of the flow of the Spirit of Jesus as he pours out of our new hearts from deep within [John 7:38,39]. We, therefore, live by flow submitting our plans, our ideas and our lives to him. We have a relationship based on love, which we are also enabled to live by [1 John 4]. This love is unconditional not being based on fear of loss of control. For fear has to do with punishment but with God we live out of love because he frees us up to become real individual people who now live in a cooperative relationship with him based on love and relationship [1 John 4:17,18]. He is Lord, but this is Lord of love, and his love loves us as real people with real choices;

who God views as sons and daughters, friends of his Son. God loves to give direction to our lives, and for us to be able to develop and grow through interaction with him by hearing his voice and dialoguing with him. We crucify self and from now on live new lives based on the new “Christ I” relationship which is indicative of who we have become through union with Christ on his Cross [Gal. 2:20].

Hence Christ and I come to dialogue listening to each other daily as I walk in the good works he has prepared beforehand for me to walk in [Eph. 2:10]. Good works are the acid test of the ethic of the Kingdom, and they always arise from the fountain of our hearts which Jesus continuously pours out through us – this new heart often has to be chosen when we face temptation – asking God to give us power to choose his way established in our new hearts opposed to the sometimes ugly uprising that our old hearts try to achieve. This battle is described in Romans 7, with Paul in Romans 8 declaring that the key to overcoming our old wicked natures is for the Holy Spirit to liberate us from within. This is termed as “our spirits agreeing with his Spirit that we are sons of God” [Rom. 8:14-16]. Hence this verse demonstrates that the Christian life and the mission of each Christian person’s life is to be lived by seeking God’s voice, and his guidance. This comes by God speaking to us in our thoughts, and in our minds eye, by giving, words, thoughts, ideas, pictures, dreams and visions [Eph. 1:18 and Acts 2:28]. So there are 4 principles which we need to practice in order to be guaranteed to hear God’s voice. These are based on Habakkuk 2:1,2. They are:

- i. “I will stand at my guard post” – Quiet yourself so you can hear God’s voice
- ii. “I will keep watch and see” – Look for vision as you pray – particularly look to Jesus for that vision – seek his face
- iii. “What He will speak to me” – Recognise God’s voice as spontaneous thoughts which light upon your mind.
- iv. “Then the Lord said, ‘Record the vision.’” – Journal the thoughts and pictures God gives to you as you hear his words as spontaneous thoughts, and see what he is showing you on the inner screen of your minds eye <sup>5</sup>.

Take 20 minutes a day to record these spontaneous thoughts from Christ. He will protect this time from the enemies incursions if you fix your eyes on Jesus. Do not engage a process of judging these words and pictures at the time of receiving them, you can weigh them and test them against scripture at a later point. Just go with the flow. This is the key to listening effectively to the God who speaks.

There are important biblical safeguards for hearing God’s voice. They are:

- i. You are a born again Christian having accepted Jesus Christ into your heart as Lord and Saviour.
- ii. You accept the Bible as your source of authority in matters of all faith, doctrine and life practices
- iii. You commit yourself to get to know God by reading your Bible regularly
- iv. You submit to the authority of what God reveals to you from the Bible

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<sup>5</sup> Virkler, Mark and Patti, Dialogue with God opening the door to two-way prayer, Bridge-Logos, USA, 2005.

- v. You have two or three spiritual advisors or mentors who you discuss your spiritual life and journaling with regularly – to help you get insight from outside.

These advisors or mentors need to have certain qualities themselves in order to be of proper value to you. These are:

- i. They are a close friend – they know you quite well
- ii. They themselves have a solid biblical orientation
- iii. They know how to hear God’s voice and do so regularly
- iv. They have a real sense of loving commitment to Christ’s sheep. They genuinely care and take their role seriously as a loving, serving responsible son or daughter of God in mentoring you.
- v. They also receive counsel themselves – we might call this supervision like that which you receive from them
- vi. They are ahead of you in certain areas of their lives in spiritual growth or maturity.

It is recommended that all “missional” leaders who wish to perceive God’s voice in their lives as they live the life which he has ordained for him or her submit themselves to spiritual supervision. This can work well when there is a degree of shared mentoring between the supervisor and the one being supervised. It is also important that same sexed people fulfil this role for each other. However, a fiancé or wife or husband can be, and probably should be, one of your spiritual mentors.

This is a discussion paper on Christian ethics, however, all “missional” leaders are human beings called to fulfil the commission to share the gospel with all people. As a person the “missional” leader must subject his or her life to the living voice of God by his Spirit. As the Spirit guides us like the spontaneous wind that the born again Christian does not try to direct, but rather spontaneously allows to blow him or her [John 3:8] in the direction God wants them to go. This blowing, or flowing [John 7:38,39] influence is felt in our new hearts as God’s way of enabling us to live from the inner most part of our real selves, the seat of our new beings in which Christ lives; we behold his face within [2 Cor. 4:1-5]. As we live by “blowing” and “flowing”, as God gently prompts us to follow him; we trustingly allow ourselves to be lead by his means. This is experienced as an enabling force in the ethical life. He starts to minister through us with mercy and justice; Recipients come to benefit from our supernatural God. A key thought is that if we live from our own resources, rather than from a heart led relationship, then God will not so readily trust us, or our churches, with the people who he wishes to “daily add as they are being saved [Act 2:47]. How can he trust his people to our guidance if we are not in practice being guided by his voice, and submitting in community to others for Spiritual insight and guidance as they use their gifts, given by God, to minister to us in the body of Christ.

It is also suggested that this brief theological discussion with its associated applied theological framework is central to the foundations of Christian ethics. Next we move on to the principles of the kingdom of God as they are outlined in Jesus so called Sermon on the Mount. We will discuss the relationship of these great principles for Christian life with the hermeneutical cipher to be found in the Lord’s Prayer.



## Questions

[1] To what extent have you found an open two-way relationship with God to have helped you decide how you should live for him when faced with hard moral or ethical decisions?

[2] How will you go about building on intimate time with God hearing his voice?

[3] How have close Christian mentors aided you in your growth in living a life for the glory of God?

### **[D] Great Kingdom Principles in Matthew 5 – 7**

The Lord's Prayer seems to be central to the Christian life and life style. It could be said that the ordinary priorities of the Christian life are given direction and focus by the Lord's Prayer. Indeed Jesus set out the key concerns of the foundations of the Christian life and relationship with God in this great prayer. It can be said that this is the paradigm of all Christian relationship and expression for the daily life.

So set's look at it briefly point by point. It is of course found in Matt 6:9-13:

- i. "Hallowed be your name" – "Hallowed" can be understood to mean "may you be respected more highly than any other – may you be held in highest honour". The term "name" is taken to be far more than a means of self identity – it is expressive of character. As mentioned already the use of the Aramaic word "Abba" is expressive of a child's address to his or her "daddy", or "most dear and intimately known dad". Therefore, this is a prayer of profound relational intimacy – expressive of far more than just a simple utterance without relationship or intimacy. The Lord's Prayer sets out the whole grounds of all real Christian prayer as intimate dialogue and relationship with Father God. Jesus came from the "bosom" of the "Father" [John 1:18]. He only did and said what he saw and heard the Father doing [John 5:19]. He had this relationship by the indwelling Spirit just as we should [ft]. We therefore come to understand prayer as intimacy in the light of the illumination of Jesus relationship to his heavenly Dad – particularly as John's gospel illuminates this for us. This relationship is for us as the whole deity Father, Son and Spirit come to live with us and be in us – they make their home with us and we with them [John 14:23 - 26]. So the first cipher for understanding Jesus new Kingdom teaching found in the Sermon on the Mount is to say that no man or woman can live in intimacy with Dad God without being radically ethically challenged!
- ii. "Manifest your rule" – This manifestation has already been discussed in some detail above in the light of eschatological salvation, however, it may be further noted that the concept of manifestation of the "rule" of God is based on a love response toward serving the Father rather than fear of punishment [1 John 4]. If we have come to know what Jesus is like we also know what Father God is like [John 14:9]. We submit to the ethical reign of God in our lives because he first loved us [1 John 4]. We know that we are completely forgiven and accepted in Christ 100% for all time [Rom. 6:1-8]. God is for us not against us and nothing g can separate us from his love [Rom. 8]. The whole of our lives past present and future are covered by his calling and plan [Rom. 8:28 – 30]. This is a completed action in us

that eternally secures us as elect sons and daughters with our individual names having been written in the book of life from before the world was made [Rev. 13:8]. God knew us in advance [Jer. 1:4]. Hence we were chosen in advance by Christ [Eph. 1:3]. Christ's almighty power has accomplished everything for our salvation and new "missional" life [Eph. 1:11]. All we need to do is submit in trust to him and live out of the flow of his plans and purposes for our lives [John 7:38,39 Eph. 2:8-10]. So at the centre of God's name and rule is this 100% unconditional love and regard for our persons. This is the prime ethical motivation of the Christian life that firstly, we never again have to doubt that we are securely in God's hand and can never be lost [John 10:27 – 30], and secondly, that we are free to live on the principle of giving up on self effort and living by Christ's new life dwelling in our new hearts. So thirdly, we do not consider Kingdom ethics to be a burden but a joy as we please the Father, and please each other by not hurting and harming others, but by living by the ethical rule of love. This is how all men will come to know that we are Christ's people "by the love" we have "for one another" [John 13:35]. This is the essence of all evangelism. Forget the methods! God accepts us but not all of our behaviour. But when he points out sin in our lives it is to lovingly correct, not to threaten us with eternal loss – manipulating us with fear of loss of salvation – yet many ministries will use fear and manipulation [Rev. 3:19]. The "missional" minister will never do this! It is always the way of love to secure people in a positive relationship in Love; manipulation is the enemy's tactic. Hence we may recognise the primary role of the rule of God as love and 100% positive regard and acceptance to the person, but not all behaviours. The closer we walk with Christ the more we will be transformed by sacrificing all that hurts him and becoming transformed because of the rule of love – which is the prime definition of ethics delivered to us by Paul in Romans 12:1,2 and 1 Corinthians 14:1. The Sermon on the Mount sets out the attitudes and motives of heart that the Holy Spirit of Jesus wishes to grow in us.

- iii. "Accomplish your will on earth as it is in heaven" – We are talking about every high minded thought being brought to the subjection of the mind of Christ here [2 Cor. 10:5]. It is in the mind that truth wins the day and sets man free in Christ – for the truth will set you free [John 8:32], and Jesus is the fountain of all truth. So the Sermon on the Mount's great principles are facilitated by submitting our wills, our thoughts and our practices to the mind of Christ; which is energised by his living Spirit cooperatively being chosen by us and flowing out of our hearts [John 7:38,39]. It is the heart which is this seat of Christ's indwelling rule. It is through our hearts that Christ flows and transforms us [Mk. 7:21]. It is therefore, not my will but yours be done Jesus, as I trust myself to you, and come to love your ways and your great principles of living. Ethics are driven by focussing on God's will being done and established in our lives and in the "missional" context of our work for him. In the sphere of Christian life this rule is summed up by: [A] what we were created to be in God's image – to have loving dominion over creation, and the world he has given us loving charge over under his rule [Gen. 1:26]. [B] To extend the kingdom of God into every nation establishing all men and women in a relationship with Jesus. This affects our attitude to politics, economics, education etc – we

must be positively involved in extending the kingdom in every sphere we were created to do. We ask for God's will to be done even in this present world order! Kingdom ethics matter when they are proclaimed and lived out in the community of the church, and as we extend it into the world. The primary evangelistic tool is that all people will know Christ is with us by the love we share in community [John 13:35]. Hence we must develop our intimacy with the Lord of glory. Millions will come to Christ in Europe, where thousands are at the moment, when the church gets this prime principle driving all Christian life and community. People will want what works, and God's kingdom of love and care works perfectly, people will want what they see perfectly working in the church. No wonder we lack intimacy in our churches with each other and Christ - so often. Yet this characterized the Acts church [Acts 2:44], and it was infectious, none could ignore it, they might reject it, or try to use it [Acts 5], but they were won to it as well! It must become our great aim to teach people how to come to intimacy with Christ!

Hence we can see that the first three petitions all focus on God. The other four focus on the disciples' needs. Hence we have the petitions for the Christian life.

- iv. "Give us our daily bread." [A] God is profoundly interested in every aspect of the spiritual and physical needs of his people. So he provisions us to do his will in every practical way. The ethical life is based on physical needs being fulfilled as much as the spiritual. Materialism is not to be the driving force of the disciples' life, but looking to God to provide for us. [B] God has real joy in facilitating abundant life for our personal joy [John 10:10] – he loves to lavish us with his love even in material ways not just spiritually [Eph. 1:6]. Materials are not the problem in the Christian life, but the motives we have – do we seek them or intimacy with the King?
- v. "Forgive us our sins as we have given those who have sinned against us". This is a fundamental attitude of a grace directed life. Because God has 100% saved us by grace we must offer 100% grace and forgiveness to all people [Matt. 6:14,15]. That must be our attitude. And intimate relationship with God will enable the flow of grace and forgiveness in our lives. If we are freed from hatred, and un-forgiveness, then we will be free to live in the liberty of love as we "missionally" offer forgiveness and love to the lost and the saved.
- vi. "Protect us from temptation." It is a principle that God does not use force. However, if we give him permission he will "cause us to walk in his ways" [Ezek. 36:26 - 28]. This is teaching about the new heart that is often neglected. God will "cause us to overcome habit based temptations" which we keep falling to if we choose to permit him to out of trust and love. This means not living out of our own resources any more but by the power of being connected to the living vine – Jesus – this happens by connection to the Holy Spirit [John 15]. "Apart" from Jesus I "can do nothing". It is allowing Jesus to "abide in us" [John 15] that will bring about this transformation.
- vii. "Deliver us from the evil one". We are to seek to live out of the flow of an intimate relationship with Christ, and this means that we need to pray for

deliverance from the enemy who will always aim to dry up that flow by putting blockages in our hearts through sin habitual or other. We cannot ever live victoriously overcoming Satan on our own resources – hence we are to always seek deliverance – dying daily to self and sin and walking by the Spirit of Jesus [Gal.5:16]. We are not fighting against flesh and blood so much as against spiritual forces of wickedness [Eph. 2:1-6]. They are defeated by Christ – and it is imperative that we walk by the Spirit of Christ – this means maintaining intimacy and always seeking the help that God pours through the flow in our new hearts [John 7:38,39].

Hence we have discussed the Lord's Prayer as the great hermeneutical cipher to understanding how we are to live by kingdom ethics. The Sermon on the Mount is based on a positive submitted life toward Christ our King. We are enabled by the person of God, not the principles outlined in the sermon, to live that ethical life. Principles cannot be lived out of our own resources failure will always follow that self derived pursuit after a goof life. It comes out of the intimacy and power of the indwelling victorious Christ; who is the perfect expression of the kingdom motives expressed in the sermon!

### **Exercises from the Sermon**

[1] Sort out the various pericope found in the sermon, and give what you think is the most appropriate summary of the principle/s outlined in each pericope – write them down.

[2] In what ways do the principles outlined in the teaching on the Lord's Prayer apply to each of the pericope you have categorised?

### **[E] A Brief Journey through Biblical Ethics**

[1] If we were to try to give a simple skeleton of the stages of the process of the expression of Biblical ethics in the Bible we are really talking about the source of all ethical life as it flows from a sinless deity.

[2] Eden ethics are profound and yet simple at the same time. On the one hand there is only one prohibition – not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil [Gen.2:17]. This prohibition is really indicative of a choice. Choice is central to real being from creatures who have been made in God's image [Gen. 1:26]. We cannot be real unless we have choices, and we cannot be real unless we are aware that we have them. The image of God is far more complex than this of course as a theological doctrine, but these are two key starting points. Before Adam and Eve eat of the Tree they do not know of a life outside of the purity of the perfect ethical life which God has established for them. There is no need to identify sin with laws and commandments when there is no law that has been broken. A perfectly open relationship with God enables them to freely walk nakedly [vulnerably] in the garden talking with God [Gen.3:8]. This is a perfectly pure state of being so all relationship with God is unhindered by lack of trust, willing vulnerability, complete honesty and openness etc.

However, the Tree gives a choice. It is possible to choose to not trust God. It is possible to close the door on him and live for one's self. The enemies' lies are to accuse God that he is selfish at heart [Gen. 3:1-6]. Man in choosing to eat from the tree expresses lack of trust. He no longer trusts God's motives. This is definitively what evil is and it is the spring of all sin. It is a broken trust relationship. Man and woman sew fig leaves together and cover their vulnerable nakedness with them. They have started to close the door to open and honest communion with God [Gen. 3:8]. What they have done is started the process of an ever increasing distrust in God, and a greater and greater selfish pursuit of life without openness to God. Of course this selfishness means that the door is opened to all sin; Selfish pleasure seeking and the desire to control one's own destiny. A rejection of God's law of love and the sensitivity we need to have to others. Man now lives by the principle of self protection and will seek to harm others in the pursuit of his own ends. His very nature is damaged by sin. It is impossible for him to any longer live a good ethical life on the basis of his own resources of a pure nature.

Moreover, the book of Genesis is the book of generations. We have the origin of man and an expression of what his real destiny was to live in complete openness and communion with God – being made in his creative image. His creative image is that each person might be creative in building community, society and expressions of the manifest creativity of God in infinite expressions of making and creating in love. Edenic society was kingdom society as each person before the fall potentially could have built and created in the context of a completely safe loving, trusting and openly honest society. The fall destroys our liberty to know the joy of complete union with each other and God in love forever – making and creating for the love of giving in infinite expressions of God's great soul.

[3] Moses and ethics. Things continue to decline as time passes. With Noah's generation the thoughts of all other men and women become completely corrupt [Gen. 6:5,11,12]. Hence God eradicates that generation saving the only people who still are willing to listen. If he had not done this then there would be no world today, and no potential growth and life possible. At Babel he takes another step to protect mankind's existence so that further generations may be born to have a chance to choose God by confusing languages at Babel lest man should quickly once more devise evil and destroy future generations' existence [Gen.11]. Life is also shortened because long life means the possibility for some to plan evil for longer.

Abraham appears [Gen. 15] and he is possibly the one man in the whole of old covenant history gets what God is really like. He starts off very untrusting – trying to do God's job for him by helping him out with the son of promise by taking another wife etc. He ends up trusting God so much that he is willing to let his son die as a sacrifice. He is the only one who gets the Father's heart and the Father's willingness to sacrifice his son for the salvation of the world [Gen. 22].

By the time we get to Moses things are in need of some redefinition. Abraham did not need a law code to learn to trust God, because in heart he learnt to be teachable coming to fully 100% to trust God. God helps Abraham to come to know him by

revealing himself in characteristics defined as names of God <sup>6</sup>. By the time we get to Moses the choice for the liberated children of Israel at Mount Sinai is whether they will trustingly listen to God's voice for themselves or whether they will close their hearts to him. They are so fearful of God that they demonstrate that they are not real children of Abraham the man who trusted God, and loved him, but rather they fear him and mistrust him. They say to Moses you speak to God, and tell us what he says, but we don't want to do that – in essence they are saying we don't trust him. [Deut. 5:22 - 31]. So they give up on a personal relationship with God based on trust in him, and get something else, the only other thing God could give – Laws.

The law is given to stop them doing evil, and to keep them from wandering even further from God because they are fearful. And perfect love has no fear in it [1 John. 4], but they had a lot of fear. They did not trust God or his motives. They were struggling with their distrust of him. But they also saw at Sinai they could not ignore such a God. So God tries to keep hold of his people by getting their attention. A life lived out of laws feels safe to them because you can feel safe with fixed laws, rather than a living speaking God who moves a person on in a growing and trusting relationship. Law sets limits and it traps them in those limits. It does not change hearts. It does not change motives, but rather it highlights that we are wretched and helpless to keep the heart of law which is love for God first, then our neighbours as ourselves. Paul recognises this process that with law only we just keep on falling and never realising a new life liberated to live in the freedom of Christ [Gal.2:19,20], in purity and ethical freedom following God's loving heart because we trust him, commune with him and live out of the flow of the Spirit of Jesus.

To Paul the law was given to make sin utterly sinful, not to make us able to keep it [Gal.3:22]. Rather the law is our jailor keeping us in the prison of our inability to keep it. But by accepting Jesus atoning death, resurrection and ascension we are freed to walk by the Spirit of Jesus [Rom. 8:14 - 16]. We are now living hearing his intimate voice [Acts 16:9]. We live out of the flow of a new heart that is fully and potentially within us that now makes us have edenic pure communion once more [2 Cor. 5:17]. We come to realise that life without Christ, and with law is living death [Read Gal. 3 & 4]. We do not serve out of love but by duty. Jesus life, death, resurrection and ascension show us what God is really like [2 Cor. 5]. We get it, like Abraham did – God will give everything of Himself, and has in Christ [John 3:16] so that we can see that he loves us – as real people who he honours as such by letting us have choice and self awareness. He wants us to choose life, by choosing no longer to follow Satan's lies about God's nature, but to see that God is thoroughly giving, loving and trustworthy; and that we can forever live in dialogue and relationship with him in eternal creative joy – submitting ourselves to our King, Lord and God because we now understand we can trust him. Christian Ethics are based on a new heart, and a new love that does not doubt God and his motives in any way. We have been liberated to do this by the new covenant heart [Ez. 36:26]. It is written into this new heart that God will cause us to walk in his ways. This happens because there will never be any other way to live – the difference will be that we will always trustingly choose to do this.

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<sup>6</sup> Wilkerson, David, Hallowed be Thy Names knowing God as you've never known him before. Rickfords Hill Publishing Ltd., UK, 2003. see on chapter 1.

Living by works and law rather than by grace, and no longer needing to be in control, or under law demonstrates what life without Christ is – dead – for all sin ends in a void of selfishness that obliterates itself – because without opening out and trusting and growing in Christ, and with others, there is no life.

[4] Eschatological salvation. We have already discussed this in more detail above. However Hebrews chapter 12 brings everything into further focus. The writer lets the Christians he is writing to know that they are already members of the heavenly Jerusalem by grace [life without self effort or trying to live by self power or law but by the free gift of the power of Christ’s love freely given to us without limit and opening up all the unlimited resources of God to us – hence we are partakers of the divine nature, not being gods, but sharing all his resources in love]. This participation means they are already eternally in Spirit with the saved who are already there in the future age. The writer calls for the people he is writing to not to reject the one who is now calling them to be part of this eternal reality. Israel did at Sinai asking for law instead, and limits. Our choice is to live in intimacy with the living God walking in complete intimacy and vulnerability in trust with the Trinity in the city of God – which is now our possession and experience as we live out of flow.

Ethics can, therefore, be seen in this meta-narrative setting. The big picture is clear. We now live by intimacy, and love. Intimacy means we come to never want to hurt the one we love. We no longer need laws and rules, but rather we see the one we love; and love them practically by further entering their world and they entering ours in mutual open dialogical communion.

## **Questions**

- [1] To what extent is the Christian free from being “under” the law?
- [2] Have the Ten Commandments been done away with as a means of living the Christian life?
- [3] In what ways has your experience of the law versus grace issue affected your life of ethical development?

## **[F] Scriptural Principles on Particular Actions and Direction**

We may condense Scriptural principles on human behaviour by way of categorisation. These are:

- i. Prohibition – The Ten Commandments represent prohibition on certain behaviours. “Thou shalt not” is the mantra that is easily applied to their content. The Ten Commandments show what cannot describe Kingdom of God behaviour. Seen positively in the light of new covenant theology they become written on our hearts so that we now live from a far deeper place of intimacy not compromising the heart of their meaning [Heb. 8]. Love is the key to the new Christian positive ethic. We now have the ability to grow fruits of the Spirit against which there is no “law” [Gal. 5:23]. We are forbidden to do evil so we are free to do good – living by selfless Christ-like love which is abundant and free [Rom. 3:8].

- ii. Permission – Biblical ethics leaves room for many actions that are neither prohibited or mandated – the Bible recognises a large sphere of morally indifferent choices. See on 1 Cor. 10:23-24;10:25-26;10:31-32.
- iii. Mandate – Scripture gives positive direction, or mandate, for action. [A] We are mandated to subdue the earth [Gen.2:28]. This means that we actively, and physically, to make the resources of the earth work for the glory of God’s selfless kingdom, and the good of mankind, and the protection of our environment. [B] The great commission is that we are mandated to preach the gospel, and enable people through grace to become new creations [Matt. 24:14; 2 Cor. 5].
- iv. Counsel – There is a difference between command and counsel in Scripture. Prohibitions are universal and, therefore, absolute to the Christian life. Whereas there are negotiable-s of the Christian life where God has not revealed his particular will for my particular circumstances. See on 1 Cor. 7:25 – 26,28 and 1 Cor. 7:39-40.
- v. Precedent – In this case scriptural stories may be used to demonstrate that there are exceptions to rules, or precedents for other actions and behaviours. Jesus sets a precedent by referring to David’s behaviour for his disciples seemingly improper actions on a Sabbath [Mt. 12:3,4,7]. The Apostles set precedents concerning what gentile converts relationship to the Jewish torah should be [Acts 15].
- vi. Example – Christian life is also to be facilitated by reference to commendatory example. Christ is this example [1 Peter 2:19-21], but we are also to be examples for others to follow [John 13:34,35]. See also Mark 12:44; 2 Cor. 8:2-5; 2 Cor. 8:8,10; 9:13.

What I am trying to demonstrate in these six areas is that Kingdom ethics derive from a place of principle and enablement to fulfil them by the power of the Holy Spirit. We cannot live by these principles by our own self derived energies but by connection to Jesus [John 15], and by the flow of the Holy Spirit’s enabling bringing Christ’s victorious ethical life to reality in ours [John 7:38,39]. We are to live by flow walking by the Spirit not by self energy or self direction letting him grow the fruits in our lives against which there can be no law.

### **Questions**

[1] How can the above categories be further defined or modified as you consider the question of the principles behind Biblical Christian ethics?

[2] As you look through the six principles which of them seem to be the way/s you use the most when making ethical decisions?

[3] In what ways could you use these principles to further expand your understanding what the Bible teaches in comparison to the challenges raised by modern life?

### **[3] Contemporary Issues Facing Christians Today**

What I have tried to demonstrate in the discussion so far is that Christian focus is no longer on fulfilling this present ages’ concerns, becoming caught up in consumerism, hedonism, materialism, sexual permissiveness, war etc simply because the orientation of our focus is on another kingdom which we are already part of. Our major warfare is a spiritual warfare in which men and women’s hearts are won back to the King.



However, the two world dualism of now and not yet for the final physical arrival of God's kingdom rule means that we do have a mandate for positive action within society, government, economics etc so that we can be salt and light in society in this between times period. It is unthinkable that we should not be involved in making it possible for mercy and justice to reign in the name of Christ now as we claim his authority over all forces against him in this present world. Because it is our present role to proclaim liberation to lost people it is also incumbent upon us to seek our part in sustaining social and environmental order as God directs each of us to do what he asks of us in our own context. It must be said that anything which directly sets itself up in opposition to the gospel's proclamation is directly at odds with Christ's universal authority; and we as a Church can claim his rule over against what is in obstruction of it.

What I want to do for the last few pages is to raise various ethical concerns facing the Christian today. This will not be exhaustive, but I hope we can start to apply some of the scriptural principles outlined in this paper to them. Each area can have a few major questions addressed to it as they arise from our discussion above. These are:

- i. Are there specific Scriptural prohibitions concerning this issue?
- ii. Is there a specific Scriptural mandate concerning this issue?
- iii. Is there a Scriptural precedent that relates to giving guidance on the issue?
- iv. Is there a Scriptural example which might be used to commend a course of action or affect an opinion concerning this issue?
- v. Is there a principle which can be deduced from the Lord's Prayer or Sermon on the Mount concerning this issue? In other words what does Scripture in principle do to help guide us and counsel us in this area?
- vi. Is there permission for us to do or not do what the issue has raised either from Biblical principles that have been deduced, or from specific permission that has been discovered through Scripture?
- vii. How does the teaching on eschatological salvation inform your decision or opinion on the subject under discussion?
- viii. In what ways have you specifically addressed God seeking his voice and will on this issue?

It is expected that the student will address these guideline questions in each instance – so reference back to them needs to be made.

### **[1] Equality – Women's Role in the church**

- [A] Should women be ordained to ministry?
- [B] Should women be allowed to have any leadership role in the church?
- [C] Should women have an equal role in marriage, or a submissive one?
- [D] Should women be allowed to pursue a career earning more than the husband or being the bread winner?
- [E] To what extent is it the woman's role to be the home maker?

### **[2] Sexual Issues**

- [A] Is it permissible for young people to engage with heavy petting without full sex – where do you draw the limits? Touching breasts, genitals etc?

- [B] Is it permissible for young people to use masturbation as a means of relieving sexual tension before marriage?
- [C] Is it permissible to even allow same sexed young people to sleep together in the same room for sleep-over-s given homosexual relationships?
- [D] If a person has a total homosexual orientation with no attraction to the opposite sex at all is this sin?
- [E] Can two consenting adults become married as a same sex couple if they are 100% orientated to same sex desires with no desire for other sex relationships?
- [F] Can a homosexual couple attend church if they do not become members?
- [G] Can a homosexual couple who are young people be allowed to attend youth group?
- [H] Can a youth worker with a homosexual orientation be allowed to be a practicing Christian worker if he or she is a non practicing homosexual?
- [I] Given that no relationship is without two sides can the church accept that sexual infidelity in marriage by one partner as that partner's responsibility alone?
- [J] To what extent can one partner choose to abstain from sex in marriage, and for what reasons?
- [K] Is masturbation permissible in marriage?
- [L] In what ways can oral sex be part of a Christian marriage?

### **[3] Divorce, adultery and remarriage**

- [A] Is there such a thing as a guiltless party in marriage if one commits adultery?
- [B] Is there such a thing as a public sin of adultery which the whole church should be made aware of, or if it is only known to the church leaders then can it be dealt with without letting the whole church know?
- [C] What guidelines should be followed in determining when the church should sanction divorce?
- [D] What should the church do if a divorced person wishes to remarry?
- [E] What steps should the church take in seeking reconciliation?
- [F] Should the church offer marriage guidance courses and counselling?
- [G] To what extent should the church offer child rearing courses?
- [H] In what ways is it the churches duty to offer premarital guidance?

### **[4] War, Crime and Punishment**

- [A] Is there such a thing as a just war?
- [B] Can Christians fight in a war?
- [C] What is the case for a pacifist position?
- [D] Can a conscientious objector serve in any military role?
- [E] To what extent can you support the criminalisation of minor offences like speeding, litter dropping etc?
- [F] What is the purpose of imprisonment – to reform, protect or punish?
- [G] Is there a case for capital punishment?
- [H] Is there a difference between murder and killing?

### **[5] Environmental issues**

- [A] Do we have a part to play in protecting the earth from damage by the way we use its resources?

[B] To what extent should Christians be involved in protesting against the storage of vast amounts of foodstuffs and not distributing them to the starving?

[C] What questions should we ask ourselves about the way we spend money on ourselves when that affects our environment through the use of more greenhouse gases?

[D] To what extent should we be involved in the proactive groups which use illegal means to get their point across? An example would be the threats made against employees at animal research laboratories.

[E] Should Christians seek to protect endangered species?

[F] To what extent should Christians become politically involved with Green politics when such groups also promote homosexuality as part of their agenda?

## **[6] Wealth and Economics**

[A] Is it permissible for a Christian to pursue a career which will create an abundance of personal wealth?

[B] Is wealth and Christian living fundamentally incompatible?

[C] Should Christians become COs in leading FUTSI 100 and 250 companies?

[D] What should the Christians view of the way they use their money be?

[E] To what extent is it realistic for the Christian church to keep on pouring money into third world countries to fulfil basic needs without providing the means for such cultures to better themselves, and develop their own means of dealing with poverty?

## **[7] Education**

[A] To what extent is education the right of everyone?

[B] To what extent is it right for Christian teachers to work in state schools which forbid the teaching of a personal Christian view?

[C] To what extent should Christian educational centres be established alongside the state option?

[D] To what extent can the church allow a non-Christian youth worker to work in a church because of equal rights legislation?

## **[8] Health and Well Being**

[A] How is the Christian to draw the line between seeking God's healing by miracle as a first line of intervention compared to seeking professional western medical intervention as the first line of action?

[B] Is euthanasia for terminal patients a merciful act which the Christian can support if it is a matter of shortening suffering by giving medication that is known will bring about death more speedily?

[C] To what extent is it a Christian duty to embrace the welfare state with a free national health service? Is this part of a Christian social ethic?

[D] To what extent should Christians take part in drug trials which may have harmful effects on them?

[E] If one of your youth becomes critically ill, and their family wish to withhold treatment that is known to have a good chance of working on religious grounds then what is your role as a Christian youth leader? To support the family? To support the hospital in enforcing treatment under current legislation?

[F] To what extent should the church be involved in medical missions where there is no local national will to provide it because of corrupt government? Are there times when standing by allowing suffering can be good for greater long term benefits which will mean a government has to eventually act because no one else will?

[G] Some times it can seem that we have to choose the less of two evils, so to speak. For example a cheaper medicine means more get it, whilst a more expensive one means fewer special cases benefit. To what extent can the Christian be involved in making such choices? Should we avoid them all together?

[H] It has been said that abortion is the silent holocaust. Are there any grounds on which a Christian may seek an abortion? Is a foetus alive? To what extent is abortion murder?

### **[9] Social action and concern**

[A] To what extent is it consistent with Christian ethics to change communities with a high rate of gun crime, prostitution, vandalism, alcoholism and intimidation?

[B] If a paedophile is known to live in your local community to what extent should you be involved in social action against his or her presence?

[C] In what ways should the church be involved with providing its services, and resources to community needs – such as action groups, family support, drug support, victim support etc?

[D] In what ways is it a Christian duty to provide support to the homeless?

[E] Should the church offer counselling services to un-churched people?

[F] To what extent should the church avoid social intervention because it can become part of the problem – with people using church services as a crutch rather than encouraging them to face up to problems by dealing with them for themselves?

I recognise that the categories I have discussed in this last section are far from exhaustive. However, what I have aimed to do is to start the dialogue of ethics with Christian life and Kingdom responsibilities by those I have raised.

### **Conclusion**

It would seem fair to say that the greatest duty facing the Christian person is to live according to the revealed will of God for his or her life. However, part of this will is intrinsically based on community. We are part of God's family. Family means community, responsibility and loving actions and behaviours to one another. Having said this individual Christians need to know what battles to fight. We are not God, but members of the body of Christ. We are not the whole body. We are a part of it. Christ is the director of his body, and he gives each gifts. Hence we need to know what the head, Christ, is personally calling us to do in the ministry he has ordained for us [Eph. 2:8-10 and Jer. 1:4]. He has specific plans for each of his people. What we need to do is to know what he is asking us to do for him each day just as Jesus did [John 5:19]; as well as what he is calling us to do perhaps in a broader anointed sphere of ministry. We cannot change the world by ourselves. We cannot choose to fight all the battles; we do not have the resources. But we can ask God to make it clear through his living guiding Spirit what he has planned for us to do for a day, time or season for him and others. Hence the real starting points of ethics are:

[1] I belong to him in a saving relationship.

[2] He is the director of my life as my loving Lord.

[3] It is his responsibility to guide me and for me to ask for guidance and to follow it.

[4] I am a part of the body of Christ not the whole body, and Jesus guides others to do things he has not asked or equipped for me to do.

[5] It is his job to save the world, I am an instrument and a vessel following in the part and role which he has asked me to play under his direct guidance by the Holy Spirit [Acts 16:9].

[6] This sets me free from guilt for I do what I see the Father doing through my ministry, rather than trying to look at every need, and never being able to do any one thing effectively because I do it in my own resources rather than the Fathers'.

[7] Personal and Christian ethics are synonymous to each other. However, not all ethical issues with their resultant behaviours and systems of expression are my job to tackle on a social concern level. I can disagree with unethical behaviours and systems without having to tackle them all!

May God guide us to that place when we know the throb of the Father's heart so well that we like Peter and John knew immediately that it was God's will to heal the lame man at the gate called beautiful [Acts 3].

In Jesus name – Amen!