

Finding God's Will

For Africa:

Study Notes On Ethics

Prepared for Cameroon Baptist Theological Seminary

By Rev. Gary A. Stephens

Revised: September, 1997

Printed 30 March 2000

Copyright © Gary Stephens 1997

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE	IV
INTRODUCTION	1
GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS: WHAT IS ETHICS ALL ABOUT?	1
ETHICS: A BIBLICAL APPROACH TO SOME DEFINITIONS	3
ETHICAL SYSTEMS AND APPROACHES	5
"DESCRIPTIVE ETHICS"	6
"TELEOLOGICAL ETHICS"	8
"AXIOLOGICAL ETHICS"	9
"DEONTOLOGICAL ETHICS"	10
IN CONCLUSION:	11
MAKING VALUE JUDGMENTS AND ETHICAL DECISIONS	12
BIOLOGICAL NEEDS:	15
PSYCHOLOGICAL NEEDS:	16
AFRICA: DOING RIGHT IN A TRIBAL SOCIETY	17
CHANGE ON THE VILLAGE LEVEL	17
A CHRISTIAN MODEL FOR CHANGE	20
THE UNIQUENESS OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS	21
FOUR ANCIENT PHILOSOPHIES AND THEIR ETHICS	23
<i>Platonism</i>	23
<i>Stoicism</i> :	24
<i>Cynicism</i>	24
<i>Epicureanism</i>	25
SUMMARY	25
HOW GOD MAKES THE CHRISTIAN WALK UNIQUE:	26
OUR EXPERIENCE OF CHRIST	27
USING THE WHOLE BIBLE TO MAKE ETHICAL DECISIONS	33
LAW	34
THE PROPHETS	39
WISDOM	42
<i>General principles for studying Wisdom</i> :	44
THE GOSPELS	45
PAUL'S WRITINGS	47
APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE	49
NARRATIVE	50
CONCLUSION	52
APPENDIX I: THE WORLD OF THE NEW TESTAMENT	53
APPENDIX 2: JOHN STOTT, SOCIAL ETHICS	54
NOTES FROM EITEL'S TRANSFORMING CULTURE	56
BIBLIOGRAPHY	56

Preface

Not a great deal has been written on the subject of Christian African Ethics. From an evangelical viewpoint, there are several reasons for this: First, African culture, particularly that of Cameroon, is not monolithic. Depending on the source consulted, Cameroon has as many as two hundred and fifty-six different tribes, each with its own language (or dialect) and customs. Even though there is a great amount of common ground between many of these tribes, addressing specific issues becomes a very complex process. Secondly, the "African World View" is often poorly understood by westerners, and thus an inadequate Christian perspective on its ethics is often communicated to African students by those same people. And thirdly, the biblical foundations for evangelical ethics are either obscure to many African Christians, or the process of decision making by comparing Scripture with Scripture in the context of specific situations is often perceived as an unattainable feat.

This state of affairs, while not encouraging, is not uncorrectable. African Christians as they talk with each other about their varied customs, can discover the Biblical truths that all Christians can share. African culture, even though its parts are relational and interconnected, can be separated into significant themes which then can be treated biblically. And lastly, while traditional African culture is not a text-based, the Bible belongs also to African The Holy Spirit ultimately guides one into all truth. Though we must read and compare Scriptures carefully, it is clear that our dependence is not on our exegetical power, but on the one who speaks to fishermen, tax collectors, and the most common of men. Secondly, it should be noted that African and Biblical cultures have much in common. Africans readily understand (in many cases) the "working ethic" of Scripture.

What follows in this booklet are the revised class notes of one who has focused and taught on these issues. Section one focuses on the big picture, and various ethical systems within it. This includes the kinds of western ideas to which Africans are being exposed. The second part focuses on the culture of Africa, and how it can be understood from various perspectives. Section Three is most important. It focuses on applying different parts of Scripture to decision making. There is no claim here to completeness or finality. These notes present foundations for solving problems that face Africans. They are based largely on field observation and classroom interaction. They seek to understand the Christian life and ministry from different view points. But underlying all these viewpoints is the common theme that the "righteous will live by his faith". (Habakkuk 2:4)

Ethics for Africans

Understanding God's Will for His People in Africa

Introduction

Many, many problems face the African Church. There are no easy answers to some of these difficulties. A great number of these problems (like those relating to polygamy) have not been solved by Western "wisdom." Often, questions that would never be thought of in the West are asked by Africans. And sometimes missionaries do not have the answers. But this is not necessarily bad. **It is time for Africans to find the answers to the questions that the African Church faces.**

This course is primarily a **guide to making and carrying out the decisions that will guide the African Church into Christian maturity in a modern African.** It will stimulate a sharpening of the student's understanding of the relationship between Christian decision making (based on the Bible) and African traditional social ethics, as well as equipping the student to cope with the strong philosophies now changing the face of African life and morality. This means teaching the future pastor how to be a change agent for Jesus Christ and his church. This means understanding how our high calling in Christ transforms all our cultural behavior, and understanding how to use all of Scripture in helping us find out what we are to be. May God's glory radiate from this course and its ministry!

Questions:

1. In what ways has western wisdom failed in Africa? From your viewpoint, what good things has it offered Africans?
2. Does African culture need to be changed? In what ways?
3. What do you understand the words "change agent" to mean?
4. What do you think it means for culture to be "transformed"?

General Considerations: What is ethics all about?

The subject of ethics can be defined in many different ways, but a good definition is the one that follows: Ethics is the study of what is right, good, and valuable, and how one should behave in the light of those values. In this definition ethics has two parts: First, one studies "the right, good, and valuable". Secondly, one learns how to practice, or apply those things in life. As pastors, it also means that we learn how to teach what is right and best. And we learn how to help

Christians change as they try to do what is right and good. We do not substitute for the Holy Spirit in this work; we simply are helpers.

While the Bible has a great deal to say about how we act, it also talks about values that are important. When we speak of values, we are referring **to things (which could be any object or any behavior) that we think and feel are worthy, important, and desirable**. Example: In many parts of Africa, having many children is a value in society. Thus, families are very large. As we shall see, all behavior comes from the values we have in our hearts (**Mark 7: 21-23**). In Scripture it is clear that not every value man has, everything he says, or every tradition he obeys is good.

In 1 Thess. 5:21 Paul speaks about values when he instructs about prophecy in the church. He says "**Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil.**" It seems that some people had been standing up in church and saying that God had given them a direct message about this or that, or about the future, and what the church should or should not do. The words these people spoke were to be tested (We will think about this later). Every kind of evil was to be avoided.

In Phil. 4: 8 Paul clearly challenges his brothers in Christ to examine the values that they held: "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, *think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me--put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.*" Here two observations are very important:

- ◆ Our thought life is very important to God. Our values are held in our thought life. We can think about things that are true and right...., and we can think about things which are deceptive and wrong. We must learn to examine and judge our own thinking.
- ◆ Even though our values are held in our thought life, those values are passed on to us by other people, alive or dead. A person who is alive influences our thinking and behaving though their example. Often a person who is dead influences us through tradition. So we must examine both our examples and our traditions, and recognize the values that we have received, and the source of those values. However, the source of the value does not in itself make the value right or wrong. It often helps one understand the significance of what we hold to be important.

To help us begin this task of self-examination we need to study briefly how ethics (**or the discipline of examining our thoughts and actions**) began in the ancient Greek world, and what the Bible would say about the Greek perspective, and review some important definitions.

Questions:

1. Write down three important values in traditional African society. How do Africans "live out" these values?
2. How do Africans traditionally test their ideas and values?
3. Name one traditional value that is good. What does Scripture say about it?

Ethics: A Biblical Approach to Some Definitions

Historically, the term "ethics" comes from the Greek word ethios, or "good character". However, a play on words crept into Greek Literature where the word ethos came to be known for both a habit, or action, and the character that relates to it. Thus unethical behavior includes both a bad habit(or action) and the bad character from which it springs.

Different references in Scripture point out the interrelationships between character and action. In Romans 5: 2b and following Paul points out that character (or genuine goodness within us) comes as a result of actions(or attitudes). "And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope."

Other verses simply speak of the character within us, or the actions which it prompts:

Ruth 3:11 "that you are a woman of noble character."

Proverbs 12: 4 "A wife of noble character is her husband's crown."

Proverbs 31:10 "A wife of noble character who can find?"

Acts 17:11 "Now, the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness, and examined the Scriptures every day...."

But in I Corinthians 15: 33 Paul reveals a little different perspective on the formation of character within us. Not only is it formed by our own actions, but it is influenced by others around us. "Bad company corrupts good character" This he quotes from the Thais written by the Greek poet Menander, and he applies it to the problem of the corruption of doctrine. But common sense, and many quotations from the Proverbs tells us that our friends will help form our character.

Thus ethics concerns our habits, or actions, and our character. And our character will be influenced by our thoughts, our friends, and our actions. Christian character will be formed, as we will see, by reading and studying the Bible (God's Word to us), by following the leadership of the Holy Spirit and experiencing His

power and His fruit, by a close friendship with Christ and other Christians, and by doing what we know to be right.

Here, it is important to review some basic concepts as we begin to look into what Christian ethics is all about.

1. Ethics covers the entire range of human behavior that is involved in our relationships with ourselves, other persons, our world, and God. Jealousy, and what it does to people is a real ethical matter. Bribery and corruption(our honesty where we work), the way we buy and sell on market day, and how we treat the land we farm, the problem of magic and witchcraft, and most of all, how we live in families are just some of the issues of concern in African ethics. **Good ethics demand that we see ourselves clearly.** This in itself is a work of the Holy Spirit. *But further...*
2. The ways we think and the ways we act need to be tested by what Scripture says, how the Holy Spirit guides, and what we learn from both Christian experience and other Christians.

In trying to understand these matters we will also discuss how culture and traditions related to an ethical problem. It is helpful to understand the difference between these two ideas:

- ◆ **Culture:** "Culture is all the learned behavior which is (or can be) socially acquired. Included within this are both the non-material and material traits what are passed (or can be passed) on from generation to generation . In culture we find both tradition and custom:
- ◆ **Tradition** is an action or belief handed down from one generation to the next.
- ◆ Tradition is a part of all cultures, but not all culture is tradition. We are learning and doing in the present, and we may or may not pass that on to the next generation as a tradition. We will see that traditions are not necessarily good or bad. But they can be very powerful if they have been in the life of the village, tribe, or **church** for many generations. And even "**good traditions**" have the potential for becoming very bad. Scripture warns us to be careful about our traditions, and the traditions of our countrymen.
- Mark 7:13 "Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you handed down. And you do many things like that."
- Mark 7:8 "You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men."

- Matthew 15: 2 "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat!"
- Colossians 2:8 "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world, rather than Christ."

Two other words that need explaining are the words **custom** and **lifestyle**.

- ◆ **Custom** is an accepted convention or pattern of behavior approved by tradition. (Job 1:5; Mark 10:1; Luke 4: 16; Acts 17: 2) Think of it like this: In Cameroon tradition says we should greet one another during the day. This same "tradition" approves of the use of the right hand in greeting, but not the left. Or it may approve of a hug, or other ways of greeting. Tradition tells us the pattern of behavior that may include many different, and varied customs.
- ◆ **Lifestyle**: A way of life characterized by one or more significant factors; or a person's typical way of life. This word comes from western cultures where people have the freedom (and the francs) to live a certain pattern of living. Generally speaking, the person has made a conscious decision to live in a way that might emphasize some good work, some pleasure, some place, or some activity. A bad example of this would be the desire to live for celebrations and alcohol; a good example of a lifestyle might be that of a married man and woman making their home a place of rest and help for others, even those who are not of their own family or tribe.

Questions:

1. What does an African mean when he talks about "character"?
2. How is Godly character developed (According to Romans 5)?
3. Is it sometimes right for a Christian to associate with people of "bad character"? When?
4. What are some of the helps to the development of good character?
5. Good character relates to what situations of life?
6. Name the oldest tradition in your tribe of which you can think.
7. How did you learn this tradition?

Ethical Systems and Approaches

In the twentieth century four very different ways of thinking about ethics have achieved great power in international culture. Some of these viewpoints have little to do with the Christian understanding of life's problems. They are aspects of Satan's strategy to deceive man. Yet, they are extremely important to understand because the ways African young people think are being seriously affected by ways of thinking that often come from outside Africa. These ways of thinking often enter the mind through radio and television. Of course, there is nothing new under the sun. As we will see these points of view have existed since the Garden of Eden. But they have gained new power. There are as many ways of thinking about ethics as there are people on the earth, but in general they can be gathered together into four groups (or families): Descriptive Ethics (There is no such thing as right or wrong), Teleological Ethics (The end determines whether something is right), Axiological Ethics (Some things are worthy in themselves), and Deontological Ethics (There are some things we ought to do in life.)

"Descriptive Ethics"

This point of view says that ethics can **only describe** the way we act. **No beliefs are universally true.** All value judgments depend on the circumstances of a situation. Another term for this attitude could be relativism, though the two words do not mean exactly the same thing.

However, in Christian ethics we sometimes describe a behavior (a way we act) so that we can talk about its good and bad points. We will do this as we talk about what Paul calls "**disputable matters**" (Romans 14:1). In the classroom we will often describe a behavior without immediately passing judgment on it. But it is important to do this carefully in order that we not offend one another from doing right or encourage others in wrong doing. **This is not what is normally thought of as descriptive ethics.**

When one says that ways of behavior are not subject to standards of right or wrong, or even to being reasonably discussed, *one has accepted this philosophy*, or way of looking at life. Among the people who hold to this point of view there are many variations.

Among the most important in Africa are cultural relativists. These people believe that "moral practices and beliefs do in fact vary from culture to culture and at different times in history, and **none are universal.** Moral beliefs are casually dependent on cultural context, and there is no final standard for judging our actions." In other words, people act many different ways, so no way must be right or wrong.

This is a very powerful way of thinking in the world today. Educated people are often strongly influenced by it. In the schools young people are sometimes taught

that we all have different ways of doing things, and no one way is right or wrong. **These are not new thoughts!** (Ecclesiastes 1:9), but it more important than ever to understand how these thoughts are being argued, and how we can answer them. Answers to this position include:

Man has a God-Given Moral Framework In Which to Live:

Moral practices and principles are not as different from culture to culture, or tribe to tribe, as relativists claim. Even if there are differences, people from different groups realize that there is such a thing as lying, stealing, and adultery. In West Africa this is sometimes explained by saying that man was given a law by the transcendent god, who then went away.

Moral beliefs are not "caused" or simply the result of culture and society.

If morality is simply produced by the culture in which a person lives, how could any culture have independently minded moral dissidents? How could these people think differently? How could societies change? For the better or the worse? Moral beliefs(ideas of right and wrong) are not simply produced by circumstances, though some people allow circumstances to bend them.

In conclusion, it could be said that cultural relativism is really a restatement of the old positions of Protagoras (An early Greek philosopher) and Sophism (A Greek way school of thinking) who said that.. "man is the measure of all things". Some people use it to excuse one or more wrong doings. Others adopt it and take it to the extreme of lawlessness or anarchy. Yet, there are actions which are neither approved or condemned in Scripture (For example: the eating of meat sacrificed to idols). As Christians we are to talk about these things with the goal to understand each other, and to learn from Scripture and the Holy Spirit.

Questions:

1. What is a person saying when he says of "Everybody is doing it."?
2. You say "Stealing is wrong." Someone says, "That's just the way you think." How would you answer them?

"Teleological Ethics"

This point of view emphasizes that ethics can be **teleological** (from the Greek word telos or "end"). The rightness or wrongness of an action can be discerned through the results of the action itself. These are systems of ethics which are organized (formally or informally) in such a way to achieve a certain goal or "good". This means that one lives in such a way, or does certain things to get what one wants, even if that "want" is for others. And in the end, it is **only** what one goal (as good as it might be) that determines how one lives. Those who practice this point of view might be divided into two groups:

1. **Ethical egoism.** An attitude which considers only the consequences for the self. Normally we think of these people as very selfish, or even unprincipled. But practice of ethical egotism is not always apparent. Some people, while appearing to be unselfish, have the ability to use every one around them for their own purposes.

2. **Utilitarianism.** An ethic which is concerned to maximize the benefits (good) of an action for the maximum number of people. Teleologists emphasize various ways of calculating the consequences of an act in order to ascertain where and how the most intrinsic goodness can be produced. Every political movement, or party has some type of utilitarian ethic. The "good" might include land reform, food, lower prices, higher morality, or other "things". (*The goals of utilitarian ethics are not necessarily material, but that is a great danger in this approach; see below.*) And the idea of utilitarianism is to get things that are good to the most people.

Now, common sense tells us that man makes many decisions with a utilitarian perspective in mind. We are not told to preach specific sermons, or plant specific crops by direct commandments in Scripture. But we want to preach sermons which speak to the issues of the times and the needs of our people. And we plant our crops to get the most food for our families, food which will be good to eat. We want the greatest "good" to come from our words and our gardens. We want our government to make decisions which are "good", decisions which will as much as possible benefit the whole country. (Using a utilitarian outlook some people might choose something very different.) But here is where the helpfulness of the utilitarian position ends: We do not change our ideas of right and wrong on a utilitarian basis.

This is what people who are strictly utilitarian lack: a principle of "distributive justice": **how one determines what the "good" should be, and how it should be administered.** In other words, there is confusion or ignorance about what the good

(or goal) should be; and there is a tendency for the end, or goal, to justify the means (The way one reaches the goal). One person says that we should have more freedom; another says that we should have a higher morality; and another says that people should have a more fine standard of living. Everyone wants their own particular good. And some may want their own particular "good" so much that that they will do anything to get it and force it on others.

This happens in churches when a party spirit dominates. Different groups have their agendas (or "goods"). They believe in these goals so much that they will do almost anything to get their way. Many people get hurt.

It must be said that the goals of many utilitarian philosophers have been altruistic (or unselfish), but goal of teleological ethics can degenerate quite easily in raw forms of:

Hedonism: The goal of pleasure is pursued. "It is right because it *feels* good."

Materialism: Possessions are the most important things in the world. "I will do whatever that is necessary to succeed."

Political Goals: Power is the answer to all of my, of my country's, problems.

"Axiological Ethics"

Some systems of ethics can be described as **axiological** (from *axios*, "worthy" or "valuable"). From this viewpoint certain actions can be affirmed right simply because of the value or goodness they inherently contain. Many people who accept the teleological form of ethics also use this principle to help make their utilitarian system work.

As a general rule, high-minded people approach ethics in this way. Like the centurion with the noble character in the New Testament (Acts 10) they seek to do what is good simply because it is good. And without question, Christians should seek that which is worthy or valuable. [Paul instructs us to think about what is good and worthy to do in life (Eph. 4: 8,9), and to put it into practice.] However, the difference between axiological ethics (strictly or narrowly practiced) and Christian ethics is two fold:

1. Axiological ethics have no final, written standard, like the Bible, to which to appeal. What is good or worthy? How do we judge thoughts and actions? However, we ought to be fair to the person with high ideals, and a conscience. The Bible says that a conscience and high ideals are gifts from God. Paul talks about a two-fold work of God for the natural man:

- a. God reveals his glory and his "invisible qualities" to man through the material world (Romans 1:20). Man's proper response is then to live out God's greatness.
- b. There is a God-given law that has been written on the heart of man, a law to which the conscience bears witness (Romans 2:14).

Many **West Africans** believe that a powerful god created man and the world, gave him a code to live by, and then turned the world over to the spirits. We must not ridicule this belief, for the Bible says that God did create the world and did put these ideals in man's heart. But left alone, these beliefs are incomplete. Sin entered the world; man's conscience was seared. Ideals became orphans, and orphans became idols. And thus ideas of the worthy and good are not enough.

2. More importantly, the practice of axiological ethics is the living out of ideals, not the obedience to a higher code or person. The idealist may spiritually be a very lonely person, facing very difficult situations with very little comfort. We must not ridicule the idealist, even if their ideals do not quite agree with out understanding of Scripture. We should sympathize with their desire to do right. Then we should lead them to Scripture, and to God, as the source of all "ideals"(good), to encouragement to action (and a personal relationship with God). If their ideal does not agree with Scripture, point out that God has given a better way of doing things. Pray and study the Scripture together.

"Deontological Ethics"

A final category of ethics can be said to be **deontological** (from deontos, a Greek word meaning "of the obligatory"). The deontologist says that there are rules for behavior that are transcendent(above everything) and universal (they apply to everyone). "Deontology" literally means the "science of duty". From this point of view some acts are obligatory (we **must** do them) regardless of their visible ends and their consequences, or even their apparent worth. This means that we are to tell the truth, or be honest(among many other things), even if our actions bring us trouble, or problems. For some deontological philosophers this acknowledgment of obligation is the **heart** of morality, and they termed these obligations as "categorical imperatives". They simply **must** be done.

This perspective of deontology comes, perhaps, the closest of all to describing the Bible's understanding of ethics. Used with reference to the Christian faith, it refers to the duty of obedience to God's law regardless of the consequences or the immediate reasons or justification for such an obedience. But note, the philosophical understanding of deontology is more akin to the ancient philosophy called Stoicism

than it is to Biblical Christianity. It was "duty for duty sake." **In Biblical Christianity we have duties to do, but we do them for God. We obey him as a servant obeys his master. But even beyond the servant-master relationship, we obey God as His friends (John 15:15).** Thus, we obey God in a personal relationship; we know the mind of God (John 16:13;17:26); and are "comforted" (strengthened) by His Holy Spirit.

In Conclusion:

There are many ways of thinking about how we should live in the world. Each of the general perspectives described above include a variety of thinkers, and are part of almost all cultures throughout history. We should not use these categories as boxes through which we isolate ourselves from people. Rather, they should help us to think clearly about what people are really saying to us, and what they are thinking. And they can help us minister to people who have those ideas. For example:

- To help those who think that there are no absolute right or wrongs(descriptive ethics) we need to teach, and help them see the holiness of God, and his absolute standards.
- To help those who base their ideas on goals (teleological ethics) or standards of worth (axiological ethics) we must be sensitive to what they see (God may have shown them important things), but we must teach and counsel that the Bible is the only dependable standard against which we measure our goals and our cultural values.
- And finally, for those who view their life in the world as one of duty(The content of their duty must be treated in a way similar to those who hold teleological or axiological ethics.), we need to encourage them to become servants of God rather than servants of a code. A code will not reward; God will.

Questions (Find Scriptures to use in each answer):

1. A deacon in your church wants to raise money for the new building by forcing people to give. What do you say to him?
2. The chief in your village has many good ideas for the village, but depends on the jujus. How do you counsel him?
3. One of the Christians is telling his friends that is all right for a man to have sex with the town prostitute because many people are doing it, and besides, Jesus said to love people. How do you confront him?

4. A Christian is high minded, but has no joy in serving God. What might be wrong?

Making Value Judgments and Ethical Decisions

If there were a specific Biblical commandment for every situation that men face, the task of writing a Christian ethic would be easy. It is not. The task of Christian ethics would also be immeasurably simpler if we were told in the Bible exactly how to obey each commandment that we are given. In fact, we are generally given principles for behavior, and not specifics.

There seem to be three reasons for this: First, it seems very much in God's plan that we pray, study, and think about being obedient to Jesus Christ. After all, he sought through much prayer, and much suffering, to be obedient to his Heavenly Father. ("Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered..." Hebrews. 5:8). We learn obedience as we struggle with our physical weakness, our culture, and our thoughts as we make decisions. We learn to do the truth; this way of learning should never stop.

Secondly, God is opposed to both legalism and Pharisaism. People in Jesus' day had made up many rules that they claimed God had given to them, rules which they expected others to obey. If a person outwardly obeyed all the rules he or she would be both all right with God, and be proud of his or her obedience. But the Bible says two things against this: We cannot have peace with God through obeying the Law (Romans 3: 28), and God hates the proud, but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6).

Third, the Bible is meant for all times and places. It has been used by people of many cultures. God gave us principles that many cultures could obey.

Thus, we walk by faith as we learn to do what is right. And in walking by faith we walk in this world, and we listen to God's Word. It is an **assumption** in this course that we make decisions with these two different world's in view. The physical world we live in and the world of God's Word.

1. The world that we live in involves our own physical, psychological (or emotional), and social needs. This world has its cultures that guide us in meeting those needs. Two things must be said about this world in which we live. First, when God created it He said it was good. Thus, nothing in itself is bad. Not the leaves of the trees, or the milk of the palm tree. This does not mean that it is good to eat uncooked cassava or to put ones hand in the snake's mouth. That is why God created wisdom, to guide us into how to use God's good things, and when to leave them alone. Secondly, this world is a fallen world. Sin, like the dye in the pot, has left nothing and no one untouched. And Satan,

who has great power in this world, would like to use good things to tempt people to do bad actions. (Matthew 4: 1-11) In fact, he often succeeds in this.

2. The other world includes God's Word, Scripture, and the ways the Holy Spirit speaks through Scripture. This world involves the history and culture in Scripture, as well as the many kinds of writing found in Scripture (its stories [narratives], wisdom, laws, principles, etc.). It is the record of how God spoke to men and women in their time, and what he has to say to us today. Think of it like this: God gave a message to one of your friends. The message was also meant for you to hear and obey. But first you must understand the meaning of your friend's message. This is not too hard when our friend lives in our compound. But the friends that we are concerned with are Abraham, Moses, David, Paul, and the many persons and writers of the Bible. It is important for me to understand, for example, my friend Moses, to listen and to hear what he heard when God spoke. God spoke to, and through, the people of Scripture. Sometimes we do not know who the person exactly was (the author of Ruth); sometimes we would not call the person a friend (Nebuchadnezzar!); and sometimes the person does not always tell the truth. But in the world of Scripture God has spoken about all of life.

Most of the rest of this course is devoted to the examination of each of these "worlds". We cannot ignore either "world" and still be effective as Christians in our personal ethical judgments or the way we guide others. Life in Africa is just too much a struggle. The physical problems of survival and the social traditions that organize the village life are very powerful in the way people think and behave. Some pastors become discouraged in their ministries because of the persistent problems in their churches. They are simply unable to bring change to their churches and to their villages.

Two opposite approaches are often taken to this crisis. One could be called, for lack of better words, "the spiritual approach", the other, "the worldly approach".

- ◆ In the 'worldly' (secular: relating to worldly concerns) approach the moral and social problems of man are blamed on the economic, or cultural forces which cause man to suffer, or trouble his personal relationships. Thus, drunkenness is blamed on the problem of unemployment, or the need to produce palm wine as a cash crop. The answer to man's problems, from this point of view, is to change something about the situation: "Reduce unemployment, and we will reduce drunkenness." There is indeed some truth in this. Man is affected by what happens about us. But people who have this point of view often leave spiritual matters out. Their world view is materialistic: "all that matters is the physical world."

- ◆ In the “spiritual” approach all problems and changes become a matter of spiritual warfare. The devil is a roaring lion, it is said, and the key to real change is prayer and the work of the Holy Spirit. This is profoundly true! There is a spiritual side to every moral or physical problem. It is in this spiritual "side" that the Christian will win or lose in his walk with God. Paul says, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the authorities and powers of this dark world and against spiritual forces of evil in heavenly realms." (Ephesians 6: 12)

Which approach is most important? Certainly the one which stresses life as spiritual warfare. There are many situations which we may not understand, and which will not yield to "human" solutions. People can have full stomachs and still do terrible things. People can have their problems solved still deny that there is a God. Satan has his strongholds in places and people of both wealth and poverty. One can fill ones children's stomach, but fail to fill their hearts and minds. But, to be faithful to the Bible, there needs to be a balance between the two ways of thinking. Jesus paid close attention to human needs. Often Paul spoke to both questions of spiritual activity and practical need. In the Second Letter to Thessalonica he taught about Satan's work (Chapter 2), requests prayer (Chapter 3), and then reminds the people of his rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat." (II Thessalonians 3:10)

To summarize, on one hand we must depend on the power of the Holy Spirit, and use the weapons of our faith to battle Satan's efforts to disrupt our fellowship with God. On the other hand we must be alert to **the devil's practical strategy to defeat our walk with God and our churches. Understanding this strategy means that we understand ourselves and we understand how people make decisions in the world.**

The first stage of decision making involves our physical and our cultural situation. The ethical behavior of a baby is simple. He wants to be fed, to be comfortable, and to be held by his mother (or others). Some people would say that real ethics are above all this. In a sense that is true. An ethical person rises above the level of appetite. But that is only half the truth. Throughout our lives our needs still influence our decisions. A man's hunger may influence him to steal; his desire to be at one with others may lead him to worship at a village shrine; or his desire for money may tempt him to take another wife to work his fields.

Individual persons tend to make decisions based on a relatively simple set of needs. Making Jesus Lord of our lives changes the way we think about these things, but the needs always remain with us as long as we are in human bodies. There are biological and psychological needs.

Biological needs:

Jesus did not condemn our physical needs. On the contrary, even though he experienced great hardship, God took care of him (Matthew 4:11), and he often ministered to the physical needs of others (Matthew 14: 13-21). He recognized this primary need, but told us not to put our physical needs first in our lives: "For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well"(Matthew 6: 32,33). What are these "things", or biological needs of which Jesus spoke?

1. Food and other necessities: Man does not live by bread alone, but certainly what we eat or drink, or what we wear (shelter) is important. It is natural to think about chop, but it is not Christian for our god to be our stomach (Philippians 19-21). How can we know when our stomach, our compound, or anything else becomes our god? How can we learn to put God first? We will explore that later.
2. Sex (the instinct to continue the race). Sex is a God-given drive. In Genesis we read that God told man to "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it."(Genesis 1:28) The "word" within man that moves him to continue his family was placed there by God. And God blessed conception, pregnancy, and birth. (The woman getting "belly".) But God did not bless all the wrong ways these sexual feelings are used. The issues of sexual conduct and family living are among the most difficult, and most important topics of Christian ethics. They are also the most difficult to talk about on a cross-cultural basis. Why? There seems to be three reasons;
 - First, taboos exist in every culture as to what is proper for public discussion. This particularly is true in "Christian" societies. It is important not to be crude or lascivious(salacious: "arousing or appealing to sexual desire or imagination"), but many important problems are never addressed because a pastor did not have the courage to speak about them.
 - Second, there are different standards in each society about what is proper and improper behavior (mores=see below). An example of this might be the different ideas about the public show of affection between the husband and wife. In the west it is good and proper for a husband and wife to "hold hands" in public. In Africa this is frowned upon. At the same time there are many differences that exist between different tribal and cultural groups within Africa. Talking about these differences is not easy, for often they involve disputable matters.

- Third, talking about sexual matters requires that we talk about who men and women are, what their roles should be, what their relationship should be like, and how their family should go.

Physical needs are very strong and very important. Over and over African students consider how they are to feed their family as one of the most important ethical problems that they face. Is there a Christian way of looking at this problem? Yes. But it is not a narrow way, for it requires that we look into many parts of Scripture: Paul's letters, the Gospels, Proverbs, and so on. We must not allow our needs to control us, because then we will be controlled by the "self" or world around us. But how? Therein lies a strong part of Christian ethics.

Psychological needs:

Just as strong, or even stronger, are the psychological needs. Think of it this way. A psychological need is a hunger for a kind of fulfillment, or inner need, which cannot be touched or directly measured. It is emotional in nature. One "feels" fine, not because one's stomach is full, but because one's heart is full. These psychological needs vary in intensity among different individuals, but can be grouped in two general categories.

1. The **need to belong** is the need to have a family or family-like groups to which one belongs, where one knows the rules, and where one feels accepted and important. A tribe or tribal association can fulfill this need. Sadly, many people feel that they belong more to the group at the local drinking house than to any other group. The need to belong, and the need for security in that belonging is so strong that many people join associations or secret societies. In these groups they feel protected and powerful.
2. The **need for recognition** is the need to be special, to have status in the community or among the people with which one lives. If the need to belong is the need to be a part of a group, then the need for recognition is the need to stand out within the group.

Within African society, it seems, these needs are very, very strong. Its way of thinking is not as individualistic as that of the west. For an African, to be an outcast is to experience emptiness, to suffer not only present disgrace, but also future bleakness.

Questions:

1. Write about three "disputable" matters that face Africans today. Why do you think these actions are disputable?

2. Tell about one example of legalism that you have personally witnessed.
3. List two bad decisions that might be provoked by hunger. How would you counsel someone about these thoughts?
4. Big families are good. Give two reasons for and against this statement.
5. Write a short paragraph (six sentences) on what you think the husband and wife relationship should be. Be as specific as possible. Now go to the Bible and pick out six verses to support your thoughts.
6. List five things you would like to better understand about the Bible.
7. Tell why you think Jesus decided to die on the cross.

Africa: Doing Right in a Tribal Society

As has been clearly implied, the individual's decision making process is not independent of society's standards. That process is usually controlled by what are called mores. These mores are "unwritten sanctions, folkways, and customs which have emotional coloring and which enforce any particular way of life by controlling approval or disapproval." These unwritten standards are very, very powerful. Being unwritten, they are simply a part of the way we think, and are not easily subject to discussion. And being a part of the way we think, they have great emotion and impact on all we see. Thus, it seems, on the village level...the individual's anticipation of the group's approval is the foundation of moral obligation...an approval or disapproval which admits no compromise and therefore no confusion of standards. Of course, this is not necessarily bad. But what happens when the group's approval is against Christ, and the will of God?

Questions:

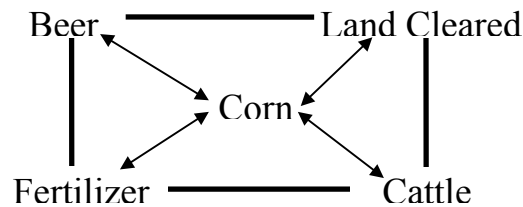
1. What social forces in your village, or tribe, work against God?
2. Should the church replace the social unit of the tribe? Why? Why not?
3. What spiritual advice would you give to someone who must stand against their family tribe?

Change on the Village Level

The pieces of a culture, its material life, its patterns of behavior, its values, its religion tend to fit together like pieces of a puzzle. This is particularly true on the village level. Everything there is interconnected and interrelated in both personal and material ways. Changing one part or behavior will affect everything else in the village. Anthropologists have gone to great lengths to show us some of the interrelationships that exist in various cultures. One example is the Tarahumara of Northern Mexico.

These people have a culture based on corn. To raise the corn they must clear land every year. To accomplish this they need the help of the village. It was traditional for every farmer to give a party for his neighbors, and to give them plenty of corn beer. They then would clear land with him, land on which he would plant corn and raise cattle. The cattle would provide fertilizer for the corn that would be eaten, and drunk at next year's party.

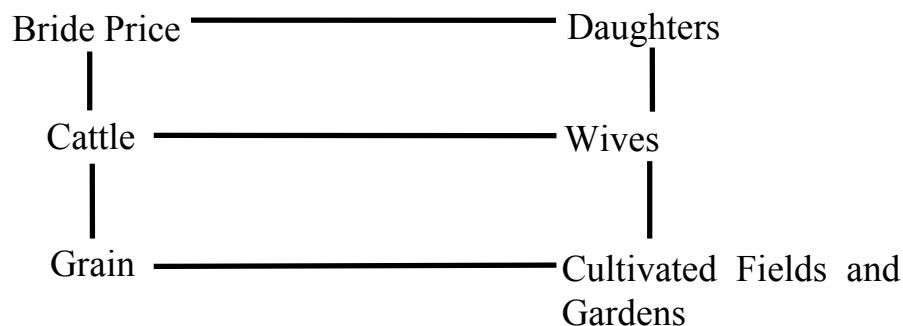
The Tarahumara Of Northern Mexico



Clearly, the question is how to break the circle (or cycle) of drunken parties. But this is not so easy. People had come to expect the beer. And if the land was not cleared, the family might face great hunger by the next harvest. This situation was faced by one Christian in a tribe in the Southwest Province of Cameroon. This farmer was disturbed at what happened at the celebrations, and wanted things to change. But he also understood the power of the more. At last he and his neighbors found a solution. Dog was a delicacy to the local people. He served dog at the celebration, along with fanta or coke. This satisfied the people's sense of fairness. The land was cleared, and the harvest went on.

Another example is that of the Sitluk of Sudan. While these people are more of the Fulani type the picture below shows how closely their economy and traditions are tied together. Wives cultivate the fields. Which provide the grain, and cattle to make the bride price for more wives. Daughters who are married bring in more cattle, and more wealth. Polygamy is a key part of the wealth building process. Either a different cycle must be found to build wealth, or wealth must be denied if change is to occur.

The Sitluk of Sudan



A Christian Leader must not simply declare something wrong without considering and trying to implement an alternative to the problem behavior. A Christian Ethicist is a Change Agent. A change agent is a person who helps change take place (or occur). He is not an anarchist, though when change takes place some disorder may temporarily occur (See page 20 on the fruit of Christian ethics). He is not a revolutionary, though the changes which occur through his work may seem revolutionary to some. He is not independent, for change in the church, or through the church involves the effort of all God's people. Most of all, he is not the most important worker, for the real source of change is the Holy Spirit. God is all knowing; he knows the ways things should go, for he has the pattern for life. If all the above things are true, what then can be said for the process of change? Is it a spiritual or human matter? It is both. Just like making decisions involves both the spiritual and the physical, real change involves the work of both the Holy Spirit and human decision making. First, the Holy Spirit is the one who convicts the world of guilt and judgment (John. 16: 8,9), and he is the one who leads in specific decision making situations (Acts 8:29). He is also the one who empowers us to tell the truth (Acts 1:8).

Prayer is crucial in letting God speak these things to us.

With His leading, and the truth in view, comes the human process of response. This experience involves three different parts. Keep in mind that an individual person can go through these thoughts and feelings, but that at the moment we are talking about a many people in a church or village experiencing these things together.

1. First, there is dissatisfaction (or something called Cognitive Dissidence). People realize that something is not right. Preaching of the Word is crucial during this phase. People listen and realize that their church is not what God means for it to be. Perhaps there is confusion in the church, and Satan is using the confusion to discourage believers. Perhaps it is the realization that getting drunk at Harvest Thanksgiving is wrong. Maybe it is the awareness that the church is not caring for its members, or loving the unbeliever. Whatever it might be, some people together decide to do something about it.
2. Secondly, comes the re-patterning phase, or the development of a new, helpful behavior, or way of acting, that will replace the old. Let's examine one of the cases mentioned in phase one, that of confusion in the church. Let us say that at Christian Meeting every one has been trying to speak at the same time, and since no one can hear the other people begin shouting. The shouting leads to hurt feelings and even church fights. The pastor, deacons, and some of the church members have realized that this is not good. But what can be done about it? Together they pray, and decide that to speak one must first raise ones hand, be recognized by the person leading the meeting, then speak. This change is

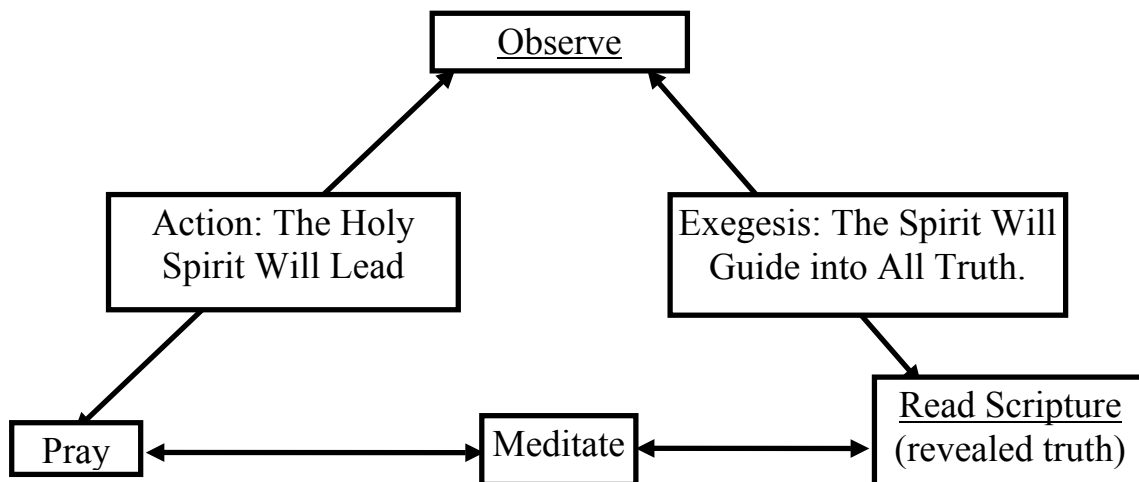
brought to the church where it is approved as a way of doing things. But the change is not easy. When they are excited, many people still want to shout; they have to be warned, perhaps even disciplined. But finally, the way of doing things is changed.

3. Lastly, there is the phase of integration or the making that new behavior a part of ones life or culture. Let us follow up on the church described in phase two. This church has learned to behave with some order (there still are some arguments) in its business meetings, but now that change begins to "spill over" into other meetings. People do not try to talk at the same time in choir practice; committee meetings become more orderly. And people even begin to listen to one another. The village begins to pay attention to the new way the church is acting, and people are attracted (to Christ) and changed.

A Christian Model for Change

A Christian's life is like a pot that has been set aside for God's use (sanctified). But like all pots, the life of a Christian must be continually cleaned, or it will become useless because of the garbage that comes out of and into ones life. Situation after situation must be faced. How do we do this?

Below is a model for inner and outer change. We need inner change because the Bible commands us to be continually transformed (Romans 12:2). We need to be a part of change for others because as Paul says (I Corinthians 10: 24) "Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others." Here is a model for seeking that change.



There are three basic step in the process: To observe, to read Scripture, and then to pray. Observing means keeping our eyes, ears, and mind open to what's

around us. It means getting the facts, being honest, and as much as possible, defining the problems. The second step is reading Scripture. This does not mean that we read only when we are desperate, or that we read only the parts that are easy or familiar. It means that we read through Scripture, that we read the Bible as we read life: with our eyes, ears and mind open to God's truth. Lastly there's prayer: "praying on all occasions with all sorts of prayers. (Ephesians 6: 18) Praying about life with eyes, ears and heart open to what God is saying

There are three bridges between these three steps: Exegesis, learning to read the truth of Scripture (and of life). Meditation: reflecting on truth as we talk to God; and Action: Putting feet on prayer, "Doing the Truth."

While Christian ethics is based on the revealed truth of God, and is to that extent deontological, there are also legitimate goals, or consequences for good Christian Ethic, of the change that we seek in ourselves and others. Think of these as also God's objectives, and the results of the work of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5: 16-26). Some of these, as well as some of the consequences of bad ethics as follows:

Consequences of Good Ethics:

Order
Love
Understanding
Righteousness
Unity
A Credible witness
The Glory of God

Consequences of Bad Ethics:

Disorder
Confusion
Mistrust
Hate
Division
A discredited witness
Sin, Destruction and Death

But doing what is right does not always immediately result in these goals. (Luke 9: 57-62;12:49-53) There is genuine conflict in the world; Satan wishes to extend disorder, destruction, and death. Remember, in the face of opposition:

- Following Jesus is most important;
- And we do not follow him alone.

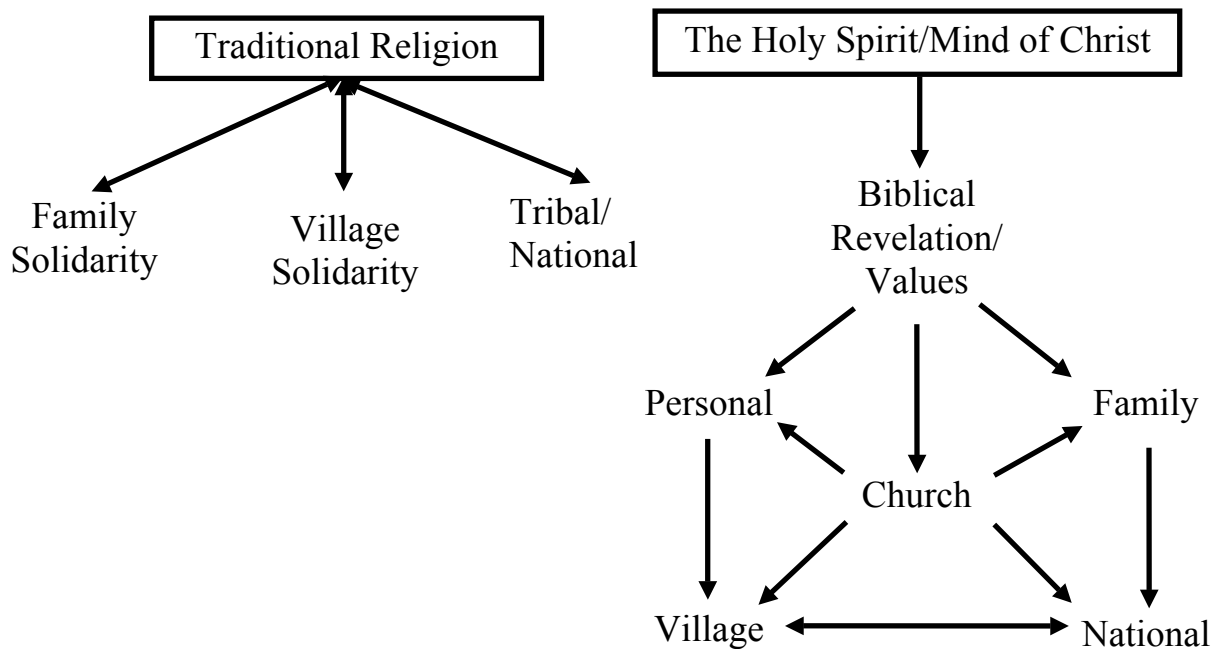
The Uniqueness of Christian Ethics

A definition of Christian Ethics might contain three general themes.

First, Christian ethics is will and the character of God, and the truth of the Gospel, applied to all of life (Galatians 2: 14). As we have seen, there are many points of view which say that there is no such thing as absolute truth. But this idea is **not** biblical, though it is true that we do not know all the truth. Scripture gives us many eternal truths (rights and wrongs) which we must use to "sift" the decisions of life. A fundamental example of this is Genesis 1:1 "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." This verse says that God is creator, we must treat this world

as his creation, and we must be responsible to him as creator. Every thing belongs to him, and how I treat the earth is part of my relationship to God, not my relationship to the spirits.

A second theme would center on the power and leadership of the Holy Spirit, the one through whom I work out my faith. Christians do not live their faith by themselves. We have a comforter, one who strengthens. God himself seeks to fulfill His Word in us; and the mind of Christ indwells through the work of the Holy Spirit. If it can be said with respect to traditional religions that "A people become like the god that they worship", how much more true it is for the Christian, "for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose."(Philippians 1:13) Biblical and Tribal (or non-Biblical) ethical systems can be compared in the following way. Traditional religion is fragments of life; Jesus Christ and His Word is over and unifies everything, with the church at the very heart of Christian ethic:



Thirdly, the uniqueness of Christian Ethics is centered, or based on Jesus Christ, and his relationship to man. Fundamental to all our behavior is this mutual relationship: First, he relates to me, and then, I relate to him. He loved me and gave himself for me. He hung on the cross in my place. He forgave my sins, and died so that I might be at peace (at one) with God. In response to that I can accept what he did for me, and give myself to him. Or I can turn away in rebellion and disgust. How I relate to God will affect, or even determine, how I relate to other men and women.

This central emphasis was completely absent in ancient ethical systems. They had no personal relationship with the creator of the universe, even though in many cases their language sounded "Christian". In looking at our walk with God we will now look at some ancient non-Christian ways of looking at life. Normally we called

these positions "philosophies" because they were a set of consistent attitudes and statements about living life. But note, they all had strong religious foundations, or implications. The four we will consider are Platonism, Stoicism, Cynicism, and Epicureanism. These philosophies, or ethical systems still live. They are alive and well in Africa. Learning to recognize them will help us more clearly understand the relationship between belief and ethics, the unique dimensions of Christian behavior, and how to speak to others of what Christ has to offer them.

Four Ancient Philosophies and Their Ethics

Platonism

In Platonism the goal for the successful life was to be like "god". To be "god-like in the way they thought of it meant:

- To know oneself. This means an increasingly deep knowledge throughout the years. Plato would say that the only wise man is the man who knows himself.
- To transform ones will through that knowledge. This would be an inner transformation, generated by the self.
- To develop virtue or "godliness" through knowledge as reason conquers the emotions.

The result of all this is a kind of knowledge leads to "salvation". But do not mistake this idea of salvation for that of Christianity's. This self-knowledge leads to a "will" (inner desire and motivation) that is both virtuous (or moral) and ordered. It is that inner clarity of the will to do what is right that represents "godliness" and thus brings salvation here in this life.

Does some of this sound familiar? It should. Platonism influenced Christianity very strongly for hundreds of years after Jesus' death, and it is the ethical philosophy of many. It is a profoundly idealistic standard of ethics, but as a foundation for ethics it has serious weaknesses:

- It presumes that man is essentially good, and that the basic problem of human existence is ignorance.
- It makes knowledge the pathway along which our will travels to "godhood".
- In the end we become our own "gods".

Biblically, man is sinful, and therefore fallen; knowledge is not the way to salvation; and in the end we do not become god. (Jesus says that we become like the angels.)

Stoicism:

The Stoic's idea of success is also to be like "god", but in this case the god in view is nature, or the world. This school of thought also put a strong emphasis on the activity of the mind. But rather than knowing oneself, it emphasized knowing the order of the world, what it called the "rational structure of the universe". Its main thoughts were:

- We could live moral lives if we just properly understood the "rational structure" or pattern of the world(universe).
- Ignorance and false opinion is the root of evil, and we can overcome that by careful thought and training.
- However, since this rational structure of the universe essentially makes certain (determines) the destiny which one has, and is beyond ones control, happiness is to be sought through virtue, or self-control, which leads to self-sufficiency and independence.(Careful though and training leads to moral living. "Reason Controls")

Again, we hear echoes of the Stoics teaching today. Much of western education is based on this process of understanding the world's order, thinking about it, and training ourselves to act in its light. (An animal which protects its source of food protects itself; so man must also protect his sources of well-being.) Of course there is nothing wrong with considering and learning from God's creation. Jesus told us to "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns.."(Matthew 6:26) And there is certainly nothing wrong with learning to think orderly thoughts. But here are some of Stoicism's weaknesses:

- Like traditional religions, it is strongly panentheistic (god is contained in the normal activities of the world).
- In fact, many observers (or scientists) disagree over what the order of the world is all about.
- Having self-control, and being self-sufficient or independence does mean that one will do what is right.

Cynicism

The cynics were a school of teachers that said that a happy life can only be achieved by struggle and effort, the struggle to desire little, and thereby lead a contented life. It is a philosophy of detachment.

This struggle meant self-sufficiency, freedom from possessions, and freedom from false opinions. The cynics do not work to change the social order; they have

given up on society. (The happy life can be achieved only by the struggle to desire little.) The cynic has given up on ideas, and the discussion of problems. Action, not talk, is the key. The cynic's god is the all-sufficient self.

Though this philosophy may seem strange it has appeared in Christianity from time to time. Often it has been a response to a social situation which was materialistic (strongly possessed with things), corrupt, and fearful. Some cynics, on the surface, might seem quite spiritual. The talk of poverty, and the renunciation of the world. Other cynics might be extremely critical (to the point of being vulgar) of all ideas and beliefs. Cynicism is a philosophy which rejects the commitment that comes with relationships. The true cynic is a very lonely person. Cynicism is a tragic way of thinking that can affect the Christian and his way of living. How does one recognize cynicism when it appears in the church?

- The cynic may sneer at plans which are discussed at Christian Meeting.
- The cynic may criticize the success of other Christians, accusing them of being unspiritual.
- The cynic may appear friendless, and mostly criticizes how bad things are.

Epicureanism

The Epicurean ethical goal is freedom through self-sufficiency. Self-sufficiency is achieved through living in quiet seclusion with other epicureans. Friendship (in the Greek sense) is in this case based on mutual advantage. (Freedom is found through living together with others who are similar. The epicurean has also given up on culture ("the trouble is in society"), but their answer to the question of "how to live?" is different than the cynics. They form little groups with people they like, and who like them. They think of themselves as an elite (superior group), and they often cultivate tastes which they think are above everyone else.

Summary

Many generations and many cultures have struggled with these points of view, though the same names may not be used. There are the idealists, the realists, the skeptics, and the elitists. Each has a different way of solving the problem of living among people and doing what is right. Each has some point (or points) of strength which must not be overlooked (but which cannot be discussed here). And Christians, even when they are completely dedicated to Christ, may look at problems with many of the above thoughts in mind. But again, the first, and crucial difference between these philosophies and the Christian walk is the absence of a personal relationship with God that comes through the work of Christ and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. From that flows all their other weaknesses.

Questions:

1. In what ways can CBTS students be tempted to be elitist.
2. If the church lives as group away from society, is it following the Epicurean way?
3. Are Christians idealists or realists?
4. Some Christian is very critical of all the church's plans? Is he a cynic? What do you say to him? Or what do you do?
5. Do traditional religious ideas fit any (or several) of these ethical ideas? How?

How God Makes the Christian Walk Unique:

As it has been stressed, in Christian ethics the way that Jesus Christ relates to man forms the basis of how we think and how we live life. It forms the foundation for what God expects in return. How does God relate to us? Here are characteristics of His ways

1. God begins things (Exodus 20:1); he chooses his disciples (Psalms 33:12; John 15:16) through his mercy to bear the fruit of obedience. "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that would last." This means that the way I live doesn't begin with me, the people of my village, or the traditions by which we live. It begins with God, for it is his ideas, his plan, and his work to which he has called me. I now live in his compound.
2. God seeks real friendship with men and women he calls---a friendship based on love (John 15:13). To accept and maintain friendship (and fellowship) with Jesus is the first priority of the Christian life. This is the fulfillment of God's relationship to Abraham when God called Abraham his friend. (James 2:23; II Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8; Genesis 18)

If God has chosen to be my friend, and I accept that friendship, then I will seek to be a friend to him. What are friends? They are two people who seek to please or benefit each other. Jesus is my friend--he saves and benefits me with his life. I am his friend as I please him with doing what he wants. Friendship with God is the honest desire to please him through obedience.

"You are my friends if you do what I command...I no longer call you servants...Instead, I have called you friends.."

3. Jesus claims a unique authority over those who follow him (Luke 6:46). He calls for a radical change on the part of his followers. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German Theologian who was killed by the Nazis once said: "When God calls a man, he bids him come and die." Jesus has the authority to mold and make us into his likeness: "A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher." Unlike the classical types of ethics we examined above, as a Christian, who I am to become is not in my hands. This is one of the great differences between "man-centered" ethics and "God-centered" ethics
4. Finally, Jesus died for me so that I might be one with God who is my beginning, who is my friend, and who is my authority. I was locked out of his compound by my sin. By that sin I had offended God, so that upon my death, my spirit would forever go away to hell. But because he loved me Jesus took for himself my sin (which he did not love, in fact, which he hates) and my punishment. His sacrifice is the key which unlocks Heaven's gate, that I may enter God's presence, eat with him, and be at peace with Him. This is called the New Covenant.

Our Experience of Christ

The cornerstone of Christian ethics is the person of Jesus Christ and the New Covenant he established with man. How we experience **Him** can be summarized in the following ways:

1. **We repent.** Repentance is to turn away from sin (The Greek word is metanoeo) and face a different direction. But just as important, repentance the decision to be obedient to God's purposes in ones life. Think of it this way: Because we are sinners we trek away from God; we repent when we realize that we have gone in the wrong direction, when we turn around and go towards God

Repentance was one of Jesus' (and John's) important teachings. (Matthew 3:2; 4: 17) Jesus taught his disciples to preach this message. (Matthew 6:13; Mark. 6:12) The early church preached and practiced repentance (Acts. 2:38;3:19;17:30;26:20; Revelation. 1:5)

Jesus' baptism was an example of the positive significance of repentance. (Matthew 3: 13-17) "Jesus came to the baptism of John, among the penitents of Israel, responsive to John's proclamation, to begin the messianic task in it fullness as he interpreted it from the writing of the Old Testament." Beasley-Murray continues, "Christ had not sinned; he needed no baptism for that. But his baptism (and its meaning) did point to what God had already called him to do." It is very important to remember that repentance includes a sorry heart, but is much more. Man

wants to feel sorrow over his sin. Fine. But Godly sorrow, or the repentance that leads to salvation is much more than sad feeling. It is to decide to follow God's Word, and to walk behind him because he made us, he died for us, and he is our master.

2. Secondly, through the Holy Spirit **we invite Christ to come into our "hearts"**. We need to do this for several reasons: Jesus says that "apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). By this he means that without him inside us, we are like empty pots. We have nothing to feed those who gather around us. We are like gardens without seed. Nothing grows in us except weeds and wickedness. We are like guns without powder. We have no strength to attack the evil of this world. We cannot be fruitful in the Christian life without Jesus inside. "Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. (John 15: 4).

How this happens is a mystery. But we do know some things about it. The Holy Spirit is God. To be more exact, He is the Third person of the Trinity; He is the unseen presence of God the Father in this world; and He is one through whom Jesus comes to dwell in the believer. He is the Counselor (John 14:26) who will speak to us the very words of Jesus (John 16: 12-15).

The second major part of Christian Ethics is the Kingdom of God. It was an important part of Jesus' teaching. It touched on all aspects of God's reign (His rule) in history. Because we are to work inside it, it is important to know about God's kingdom. Think of it like this: God's Kingdom is like a business that he began before the world was created. It has always been. Yet, like a business that is growing, it is not yet fully developed. With that in mind, Scripture says these things about God's Kingdom:

1. The Kingdom has already come into history: Luke 17:21 "The Kingdom of God is among you." Matthew 12:28 "But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you."

This means that Jesus is the embodiment of God's Kingdom. It is perfectly expressed in him. Where He is, there the Kingdom is. This also means that when we are trying to decide what to do we should look around us and find out what God is doing in the world. His Kingdom is here.

2. The Kingdom of God, on the other hand is now coming into history.)
 "...accompanied by mighty action from God..." (Matthew 3: 11,12; 6: 10

This means that as we make decisions we should pray, “Thy kingdom come, will be done.” And we should ask the question “What does God want to do in the world through me?” and do it.

3. The Kingdom will come at the end of the age, (Matthew 25: 31-46; Revelation 11:15; 12:10; 17:12), when Christ comes. The Kingdom could come at any time.

This means that things will not be perfect until Christ comes, and that we must be courageous in our decisions and work for Christ. Because we are living in the "last days" (Acts 2: 17) Christians are to behave as though Christ could come today.

4. The Kingdom is Supernatural. Men can plant the seed, but they cannot grow it or build it. Men can receive the Kingdom, but they are never said to (Mark 10:15; Luke 18:17). The amazing truth is that God will honor the obedience of his people with his own faithfulness and action. It is God who wars against Satan; it is God's work to empower those who receive and enter his Kingdom.

This means that all our decisions and actions are nothing apart from the Holy Spirit. We cannot have new life in us through our works. We cannot battle the spirits by our own efforts. In God's will we decide to go and preach in a village; God has decided to do more than we can ask or think, more than we can touch or feel.

5. The Kingdom is Soteriological (by its nature related to salvation): The object of divine rule is the redemption (release from Satan's control) of men, and their deliverance from the powers of evil. A Christian's behavior, however insignificant, should be devoted towards this purpose. Jesus' purpose for coming into the world: life for his friends. Our purpose: To make friends for Jesus (God). (Luke 16: 1-8).

This means that the purpose of our lives and our decisions is ultimately the salvation of others. Not that we can save them. But that they can find Christ and his salvation with the help of our decisions. All true obedience is meant to point to Jesus.

So when we receive the Kingdom of God (his rule) into our hearts we also receive Jesus and his salvation. We return to the person of Christ over and over again

as we seek to be obedient to His Word, the Bible. When we receive Christ we receive the many gifts that he brings to our life.

The first gift is forgiveness. Literally, it is a sending away, a letting go (The Greek word is aphesis); or the canceling of debt. Jesus enters our life's compound and declares that we are free! He paid for our sin. He is the eternal brother that paid our debts. He says to the condemnation that comes through sin, "Be gone!"

But this is hard to understand, and harder sometimes to accept. Sometimes people will say that there are two gods in the Bible, the one of the Old Testament and the one of the New. But the Bible says that there is only one God and that God forgives sin. These points should be remembered.

1. The Old Testament teaches that God forgives sin." I will heal their waywardness; I will love them freely." Hosea 14: 2) The God of the Old Testament is the same as the God of the New. The REAL difference between the two Testaments is simply that Jesus had not completed His work on the Cross in history, and therefore man could not experience forgiveness in a relationship of complete atonement with God.
 2. In the New Testament it becomes a personal business, essentially between Jesus and man. (Luke 5:20) "Friend, your sins are forgiven." I do not come for forgiveness to a spirit whom I cannot know and have confidence in. The one who cares for my life is Jesus.
 3. The one sin which cannot be forgiven is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Mark 3:29), that is, speaking of the work of the Holy Spirit as evil. Many Christians fear committing the unforgivable sin. But a real Christian should not live in this fear because they have heard the voice of Christ, they have felt the work of the Holy Spirit and recognized it to be from God. They "hear" Jesus' voice. They may not always pay attention to the Holy Spirit, but they do not call him evil.
 4. We are to forgive as Christ has forgiven us.(Matthew 16:15; 18:21,35; Ephesians 4:32),not counting men's sins against them (2 Corinthians 5). It is a gift we are to give away. Think of forgiveness as a kind of spiritual nourishment (chop) which God gives us for our spiritual life and growth. God gives it freely and abundantly. But if we try to save it all for ourselves it will spoil. It is to be shared, or it will stink in our lives.
- The power to do this comes from God, for it is his will that we forgive others their sins. "Forgive us our debts(sins), as we also forgive our

debtors(Matthew 6:12). Forgiveness' goal is aimed at reconciliation with others. (Ephesians 2: 14-16). God has made peace (forgiven) me so that I can and will forgive and have peace with other Christians.

Secondly, there is the gift of the Holy Spirit. As it has been said (page 24), He is the one who gives me power to forgive, to live out the Words and purposes of Scripture. He is the one who fills me with strength to stand against traditions I know to be wrong. He is the one who comforts and guides. It is He who brings Christ into my life, and causes me to be born from above. Though I am to invite Him into my life, He is still a gift from God. He cannot be bought with money (Acts 8: 20) or good works.

Third, there is the gift of love. But this is no ordinary love, as we will note below. It is Godly love which takes the supreme place in the Christian Ethic (1 Corinthians 13). All the right actions in the world are worthless if they are not done in this kind of love.

Three types of "love" are mentioned in the New Testament. (We call all these experiences `love' because they have been called that by men.)

1. The first is eros love. In general it is the love of the worthy. It is a love that desires to possess what is thought to be worthy. It is the raw "love" of jealousy. We want to possess something, or someone, even if they are not ours to have. An example of this kind of love is sexual love. A man is attracted to a woman. In his eyes she is very beautiful, and very worthy. Does he want to "share" her in the village? No. He desires to possess her for himself, "to own her." In a way, the bride price is symbol of eros. There is nothing wrong with eros in its proper place.
2. A second kind is Philios love. It is a love that is both "warm" and merited. An example of this love is good friendship, or fellowship. In this kind of relationship the persons see each other as "fine", and they feel good being together. One can experience philios love in a society or a club. Sometimes church fellowship is based on philios. Philios love is nourished by the same language, similar interests and values, and the same social background. Much of our socializing involves this kind of love. There is also nothing wrong with friendship in its proper place. Many great things happen through philios. But though it does not seek to possess the other person, philios is still a love of the worthy. Those that are unworthy do not merit philios.
3. Lastly, there is agape love. It is not a love of the worthy, nor is it a love which desires to possess. On the contrary agape desires the best for everyone, whether

or not they may deserve it. Agape love does not desire to possess or control someone else. It is a giving love rather than a taking love.

Agape love in man is based on forgiveness from God (Luke 7:47). It is God who first reaches out to the unworthy. This is shown in the parable of the unmerciful servant. (Matthew 18: 23-24) Thus, we are not capable of showing agape love on our own. To be obedient to God and to express this love to others we must continually receive it from God (John 15:12; I Corinthians 13).

The qualities of this love, and the instructions for our obedience, are defined by the life of Christ. He laid down his life for us. (I John 3:16) Therefore, we ought to lay down our lives for others. To do this is to make another more important than, say, our job, or our status in the village, or any other part of our life. This is the meaning of agape love. (John 15:12) We are to love people, and not the things of the world. This means:

- We love fellow believers (I John 2:10; Ephesians 5:2; I Thessalonians 4:9; 5:13; I Timothy 4:12)
- We love our family.

Husbands for wives: Colossians 3:19; Ephesians 5:25-33

Wives love their husbands: Titus 2:4.

(Through submission: Ephesians 5: 22-24; I Peter 3: 1-6)

Children for parents: Through respect and honor. (Mark 10: 19; Luke 18:20; Ephesians 6:1; Col. 3: 20)

- We love our neighbors: Romans 13:9. Who is my neighbor? Luke 10: 27-37; Deuteronomy 10:19.
- We love our enemies. Matthew 5: 43-48; Luke 6:27-35; Romans. 12:14,17-21; I Thess. 5: I Peter 3:9.

Questions:

1. How is Jesus a friend to me? How can I be his friend at CBTS?
2. What is the most difficult thing God can tell a person to do?
3. Does my peace with God depend on my actions?
4. Can we expect church members to live as Christians if they do not understand what repentance is?
5. What practical difference does living in God's kingdom mean for the African?

6. How does one express forgiveness in Africa?
7. Name the three types of love mentioned in the text. Give two examples of each kind of love as it is expressed in Africa.

In the section that follows we are going to consider some of the ways the Bible guides in making decisions. From a Biblical point of view many actions are clearly wrong. We know we should not steal. (Though different tribes have different ideas of what stealing really is!) We know we are not to take another man's wife. But other kinds of behavior are more difficult to judge. We are not sure how we should support the fon or chief. We are unsure of how we should treat polygamists who are converted and come into the church. These are only two of the many problems to which the beginning of this text referred. To be righteous, wise, and clear, the decisions we make concerning such problems should be based on a thorough study of God's Word and the leading of the Holy Spirit. Many parts of Scripture will speak to the same matter in complementary (completing) ways.

But even if we are perfectly correct in our understanding of Scripture, and we do just the right thing, it is incomplete without love (Again I Corinthians 13). In fact, is garbage. To love (as we are commanded) is to do the right thing with our heart set on giving up our life for another person. No matter how fine our buildings are, how important our pastor is, how many people we have in Christian Meeting, without love the pagan will not see Christ in us, or us in him.(John 13: 34)

Using the Whole Bible to Make Ethical Decisions

The Bible is made up of many kinds of literature. This means that at various times different authors wrote in different ways and with different purposes. Moses wrote more than a thousand years before Paul. Moses wrote his books with many purposes. Two important ones were to tell the story of God's work and Israel's History and to record the specific laws that God had given him. Paul also wrote about God's work in the words that God's had given him. But his purpose was specifically to instruct the Christian church.

The list of differences between the different books and authors of Scripture could be very long. But this should not discourage us. God is the final author of the Bible. It is all His Word. He used many authors, many cultures, and much time so that we could see His mind and his actions in many ways. Each of these points of view have something to show us about our God and the way we should live. But sometimes it is not easy to understand a part of Scripture because it has a very special qualities which need to be understood first.

But again, this should not discourage us! All parts of Scripture can help us when we are faced with a difficult experience. (2 Timothy 3: 16,17) But we need to learn how to make use of the whole Bible when we make decisions. This is like learning to use different tools when making a farm. One might use the cutlass and then the hoe. The goal is chop. Our tools are the different parts of the Bible. Our goal is God's will. The tools we will cover include the Law, the Prophets, Wisdom, Narrative, the Gospels, Paul's writings, and Apocalyptic literature. **But one point must be remembered: One passage of Scripture should be understood in light of the other parts.**

Law

In this brief guide to Scripture interpretation it is right to begin with "Law". There are several reasons for this. First, the law is one of the most difficult parts of Scripture. Secondly, the law in Scripture can provide the Christian with Moral Absolutes (Standards that are not subject to change.)

To begin with, we must understand what the Bible and its interpreters might mean when law. The word they use the word "law" Law (or torah) is used in Biblical and Ethical Studies in four different ways:

1. To refer to the approximately six hundred commandments that are scattered through the first five books of the Bible.
2. To refer to the first five books themselves, or what we call the Pentateuch. (Joshua 1:8)
3. To refer to the section of the Pentateuch from Exodus 20 to Deuteronomy 33.
4. To refer to the entire Old Testament. Matthew 5: 17,18; Luke 16:7; Titus 3:9).

Each of these usages is correct in its own way. However, in most of our discussion we use the word "law" to refer to the section of Scripture from Exodus 20 through Deuteronomy 33.

Principles to remember when interpreting and applying Old Testament Law:

1. The Old Testament law is part of a Suzerainty Covenant between a Suzerain (an overlord-a big man) and a Vassal (a servant). This "Suzerainty Covenant" is a contract, or agreement between greater (an overlord) and lesser (a servant) party in which God first chooses his people (See bottom of pg. 18), gives them commandments, then promises them specific blessings. The fulfillment of these promises went with their obeying all the commands God had given them. This relationship was very similar to the traditional relationship of a fon and his

subject. The fon granted the person land and privileges in return for obedience. If the person caused much trouble, or rebelled, they would lose their place. Israel failed to keep God's commandments (law), and lost the promises of possessing a particular land, prosperity, and peace.

2. This is what we mean by the Old Testament, or Old Covenant. In this specific sense, the Old Testament is not the Testament of Christians. We are not obligated to keep all its stipulations or laws. "None of the stipulations are binding on the Christian unless they are renewed in the New Covenant, that is, unless the Old Testament law is somehow restated or reinforced in the New Testament. "Fee and Stuart, How to Read The Bible for All Its Worth (Romans 6: 14,15)
3. All the stipulations (laws or commands) of the Old Covenant are good to reflect upon, **but many have clearly not been renewed. Among these were:**
 - **Israelite Ritual Law.** When we think of law this is most often what comes to mind. In it God gives instructions about how to worship, how to sacrifice, how God's priests are to act, etc. Nothing was left to chance in Israel's worship. God saw to it that every detail was known. These regulations were no less important than the "Civil Law", and to break them would bring destruction upon ones house. (Remember the example of Eli's family in I Samuel 1-4.)
 - **Israelite Civil Law.** For example there are the laws relating to slavery found in Exodus 21: 2-11. One of these laws says that "If you buy a Hebrew servant, he is to serve you for six years. But in the seventh year, he shall go free." This command was a part of God's plan for the nation. God expected his people to be obedient When they did not obey, as in Jeremiah 34, God told them "You have not obeyed me; you have not proclaimed freedom for your fellow countrymen....The men who have violated my covenant and have not fulfilled the terms of the covenant they made before me, I will treat like the calf they cut and then walked between its pieces." (vv. 17,18). God was serious. This was the way their nation was to be.

These laws cannot be changed. Even though the New Covenant has completed the Old Covenant, these laws still exist within the Old Covenant.(Luke 16:16,17) If a person chooses to place himself under the Old Covenant, he must carry out the whole law.

What good, then, are these laws? First, it would seem that they give us insights into the mind of God, and his will both for righteousness and social justice among his people, and it could be argued, for the nations. For example, Exodus 23:19 says "Do not cook a young goat in its mother's milk." It seems quite possible that this command

was given because "cooking a young goat in its mother's milk" was a part of a pagan ritual. God was forbidding his people's joining into, or even appearing to join into, such things.

In the civil law many social principles can be found in the same book. These can be very profitable for shaping today's secular laws. For example, Exodus 22: 2,3 says

"If a thief is caught breaking in and is struck so that he dies, the defender is not guilty of bloodshed; but if it happens after sunrise, he is guilty of bloodshed.

"A thief must certainly make restitution, but if he has nothing, he must be sold to pay for his debt."

Taken at face value, these passages teach these principles:

1. At night a person has the right to defend his family and his home even if that results in a thief being struck dead. A person cannot be held responsible for the effects of something he had to do in the dark.
2. In the daytime it is different. One can see the thief. One can see what one is doing. One must not execute one whose intention is simply to steal.
3. A theft creates a debt that must be settled. The thief is held accountable for what he steals.

But there are many questions that must be asked about the details of the law. Among these are:

1. In places where a home is lighted at night is a person responsible for a fatal blow that they give a thief.
2. Slavery is unacceptable today (Why?); so how do we make a thief pay back something they steal when they have no money.

The point here is not to give a complete interpretation of these two passages from Exodus, but to point out a way of thinking about the texts. This way involves background knowledge, reading the text for what it says, and asking questions about the text's meaning, for today.

Then, there are parts of the Old Covenant which are directly renewed in the New Testament. Among these are:

1. The two basic commandments of the Old Covenant are found in the teaching of the New Testament (Matthew 22: 37-40). Jesus would call the first of these "the greatest commandment", and the second he would call "like it":

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind."

Deuteronomy 6:5.

"Love your Neighbor as yourself." Leviticus 19:18.

The first of these two commandments reach into the inner, and thus the whole man ("our heart, soul, and mind"). They begin in the place we must begin if we are to please our God, a God who hates falseness (Proverbs 6:16-19). He has no use for obedience which is not sincere. (Isaiah 29: 13-16)

The second commandment, to "Love your Neighbor as yourself" has another very important meaning. It sums up all the commandments that tell us how to treat other people. (Romans 13:8-10) "Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law." The commandments then tells us the specific actions that harm our neighbor, actions which God forbids. To act like a Christian, and to please God one needs to understand the commandments deeply.

2. The Ten Commandments also are a part of the New Testament. But it is important to realize that they were given a "fuller meaning" by Jesus and the New Testament writers. This "fuller meaning" comes out of the "Great" commandments (Matt. 5: 21-48), the example Jesus provided us, and our atonement which comes from his sacrificial death and his resurrection.

- You shall not make for yourself an idol. I Corinthians 5:10; 10:14; Ephesians 5:5; I John 5:21.
NT: "God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship Him in spirit and truth." (John 4:24) We are not to make any representation of God. (Romans 1: 22,23) But with this we are told that Jesus himself "is the image of the invisible God.." (Colossians 1:15) We must look to him if we want to "see" God.
- You shall have no other gods before me. Matthew 4:10; 22:37; Mark 12:29; I Corinthians 8:4.
NT: Anything that comes between us and Jesus is wrong.(Matthew 8:18-22)
- You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God. Matthew 5: 33-34; Luke 11:2; James 5: 12.

NT: Oaths of any kind is wrong

- Remember the Sabbath Day, keep it holy. I Corinthians 16:2; Matthew 12: 1-14
 NT: The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. For the Christian the first day of the week became the day of worship.

- Honor your father and mother. Matthew 15:4; Mark 7:10; Ephesians 6:2; Luke 14: 26
 NT: The emphasis becomes that of blessing ones parents, instead of just not cursing ones parents.

- You shall not murder. Matthew 5:21; 19:18; Romans 13:9
 NT: Unjust anger becomes "murder in the heart."

- You shall not commit adultery. Luke 18:20; Matthew 5: 28; Romans 5: 21.
 NT: Lust and divorce are interpreted as adultery.

- You shall not steal. Luke. 18: 20; Romans 13:9; Ephesians 4:28.
 NT: Paul extends the meaning of the commandment to the willingness to work and share: "He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need."

- You shall not give false witness. Luke 3:14; 18:20; Mark 10:19; I Corinthians 13:4-13.
 NT: Truth must be spoken in love, and the tongue must be controlled.

- You shall not covet. James 4:2; Romans 13:9
 NT: The emphasis is shifted from "not coveting" to contentment and generosity. Wanting what others have is replaced by sharing with them what we have.

Some thought should now be given to the part law played in Israel's life and in the Bible. What use is the Law?

1. It "brought us to Christ".(Galatians 3:24) It did not save Israel; God saved Israel. The law simply operated as our "supervisor", a kind of `jailer' which made us aware of our sin, and our powerlessness to please God through our works.
2. It shows the principles, and specific ways through which Israel was to show her loyalty to God. (Leviticus 19: 9-14), The laws which are absolute (These begin with "do" or "do not") are called **apodictic**. Even though these were to be strictly obeyed, these laws reveal that it was (and still is) impossible to be perfectly obedient to God. (That was the purpose of sacrifice.) While the Christian is no longer under the condemnation that the law brings, we still show our loyalty to Christ as our friend when we obey what he has commanded us to do. (John 15:14)
3. It provided a case by case (called **casuistic**) examples of what should be done in Israel religious, civil and ethical life. It contained not only the general absolutes, but also examples of how those absolutes should be applied. Though our tribal or national life is not the same as Israel's, we can gain insight into the God's plan for man by studying these cases, and the principles behind them.

Questions:

1. Explain with African examples what a "Suzerainty Covenant" is.
2. What is the difference between the civil and ritual law of Israel?
3. Is a Christian supposed to obey all the commandments of the Old Testament?
4. Is the New Covenant like the Old Covenant? If not, what are the differences?
5. If we as Christians are no longer under the law, why then should we obey God?
6. Should a pastor help resolve conflicts between the members of his church?
7. Study Exodus 23, verses 1-13, and list the ways it applies to the Christian life. In light of these verses, are there African traditions which seem good? And are there African traditions which seem bad?

The Prophets

God called Abraham out of Ur and made a covenant with him. God rescued Israel and his people out of Egypt. Afterwards, he established his covenant with them in the wilderness. God's covenants with Israel continued, even though Israel did not remain faithful to their requirements. Like the father of the prodigal son, God still

cared for his people. He used the prophets to teach Israel what he continued to expect of them, and to call his people back.

The prophets were spokesmen for God. When they said "Thus says the Lord," it was as though God was speaking. They were God's ambassadors to a people who needed to remember what God had said. Since they represented God, they represented God's Covenant with Israel. They spoke from the heart of God.

They told of the future, but this was not their most important business. Only five per cent of the prophetic material tells of the New Covenant Age. And only one per cent of the prophetic material tells of specific events to come. This means that the prophets were not primarily concerned about "fore-telling" the future. They were **committed to telling what would happen if Israel did not obey God**. Over and over they reminded the people of what God required, explained the consequences of disobedience to God, and reminded the people of the promises that went along with God's covenant.

Thus, the prophets primarily were "ministers" or agents of the Old Covenant. They reminded Israel of her Covenant Stipulations (what God required the people to do), and through out Israel's history they interpreted what those stipulations were. They announced the blessings or curses which came through obedience or disobedience to the Law. (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 4: 28-30) Among the blessing were: life, health, prosperity, agricultural abundance, respect, and safety. Among the curses were: death, disease, drought, death, danger, destruction, defeat, deportation, and disgrace. The blessings and curses were always corporate; they fell on the whole nation, affecting the righteous and unrighteous. (Yet the prophets promised that God would "save" the righteous in the midst of trouble (Psalm 34) even though he has visited judgment on the nation as a whole (Jeremiah 42)

In conclusion, one must remember these points when interpreting the prophets:

1. While the prophets do not **technically** speak to the church, or to any secular nation in the modern world, they speak indirectly to the church and the circumstances of man.
2. The prophets proclaim, or make reference to many of the laws which God has put into man's heart or renewed in the New Covenant. Some of these "laws" seemed to apply to certain cultural or national situations (Amos 1 and 2) that were not totally explained in God's covenant with Israel. When the prophets speak of these commandments, their exhortations do apply to the broader, or universal situations of the church, and man.

Thus as it was with the Law itself, one must examine the actual background from which the prophet was preaching, and its broader Biblical context before one

applies each particular teaching to the believer, to the church, or to our respective tribe, or nation.

An example of this could be taken from Hosea 6: 6: "For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings." At face value one would think that Hosea was teaching against the Old Testament system of sacrifices. But this is not so. The background to Hosea's words was a time of oppression and injustice. Israelites were hurting each other. The poor were taken to court and everything was taken from them.

The people who were doing wrong then would go to the temple and sacrifice. They would act as if nothing had ever happened. They believed that, because they went to "temple" and sacrificed, they were all right. Hosea said that this was not right, that "Like Adam, they have broken the covenant--" He never condemns the covenant they had with God; nor does he put aside the sacrificial system that went with it. He preaches that Israel should be faithful to the **whole covenant** and its **spirit**, and on that basis foresees a time Israel will be graciously forgiven, that their waywardness will be healed, that Israel will again flourish and will be fruitful because of God.(Chapter 14)

In Matthew 12: 7 Jesus reminds the Pharisees of the continuing significance of Hosea's words: "If you had know what these words mean, `I desire mercy, not sacrifice," you would have not condemned the innocent. For the son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.'" In Matthew Jesus reaffirms the importance Hosea's emphasis on "justice, mercy, and faithfulness", but also emphasizes the importance of the whole law to the people of his day. "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices--mint, dill, and cumin, But you have neglected the more important matters of the law--justice, mercy, and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former." (Matthew 23:23)

To summarize, follow these steps in applying the prophet's teachings:

1. Understand clearly the prophet's words.
2. Understand the background (the covenant, the laws, the social situation) of the prophet's mind. To what law and situation is the prophet pointing?
3. Search the Scripture (Wisdom, the Gospels, Paul's teaching, etc.) for fullest possible meaning to the prophet's words.

Principle three, as it relates to Hosea 6:6, might be summarized as follows: Jesus says that while God is also concerned that we obey the full counsel of God as we know it., He is most concerned about "mercy, justice, and righteousness", (Matthew 23:23) Another examples of this type of interpretation might be found in the book of In chapter two of his letter, he criticizes favoritism in the church It is

discriminating against the poor (discrimination: showing disfavor to persons because of their poverty, family, tribal, or social standing.) James concludes "Mercy triumphs over judgment!" (v.13) The man who shows mercy will be rewarded on judgment day!! Among the many Scriptures that form the background for James' concern are Leviticus 19:15, which in turn may reflect Exodus 23: 6.

Questions:

1. Do you think that the prophets speak to all cultures and all times? Why? Why not?
2. Write a small outline of how you would teach (or preach) Hosea 6:6.
3. What are the ways favoritism is shown in the church?

Wisdom

Every culture has its own wisdom, but wisdom as a literature is relatively unique to the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East. In our brief study we will focus mostly on Proverbs, but in the Old Testament wisdom includes, in addition to Proverbs, the books of Ecclesiastes, Job, and a number of the Psalms. In the New Testament many think of James, and parts of the Gospels as examples of wisdom. Many of the types of sayings (proverbs, riddles, for example) found in these books are common in all cultures. In Israel and other near eastern countries, however, these proverbs and saying were gathered together in books and studied. One might think of these books as expressions of truth as we experience it, the guidebooks to practical living and decision making. One must not forget that for the Christian of today, as well as for the Hebrew of old, wisdom continues to be the application of truth to ones life in the light of experience.

First, lets look at some of the hermeneutical (the way we read and understand a writing) guidelines for reading and applying individual proverbs to ethics, or the way we live:

1. Proverbs are not **legal guarantees from God**. Example: Proverbs 3: 1-2 compared to Psalms 73: 3,12. They are general principles about the way we should live and the results that normally come from those ways. In Proverbs. 3 the writer is saying that obedience to his words will add many years to the life you could live, and that evil tends to bring with it judgment, ill health, and disaster. But this does not means that obedience makes God give us anything. If that were so, our obedience would be a kind of magic, or bargain with God. Psalm 73 makes it clear that there are times when the wicked are in good health, and do prosper.

2. Proverbs should be **read as a collection**. Example: Proverbs 16: 1-5. Often the proverbs, like other part of Scripture, explain and balance one another. In this passage, these verses are related, and have these general ideas:

Verse 1: Man has the responsibility to plan good things, but God opens the doors for opportunity when others say "yes".

Verse 2: Man is often blind to the real significance of his plans, but God is interested what motives lie behind our plans, and what those plans mean to our holiness.

Verse 3: Thus we are to commit our plans, and "whatever you do" to God...and with that motive, our plans will succeed, because...

Verse 4: God has sovereignty over all of man's plans and ways. He works everything out for his own purposes; he even brings the plans of the wicked down upon their heads.

Verse 5: Humble yourselves before God; do not be like the wicked.

3. Proverbs are **worded to memorable**, not to be theoretically accurate. Proverbs are meant to be pictures, or even dramas. They should be preached in that way, and put into a framework of Scripture. Example: "The way of the sluggard is blocked with thorns, but the path of the upright is a highway." (Proverbs. 15:9)

The picture: Here is a lazy man who finds every excuse for not doing what is right. He says, "It is too hot!" "The work is too hard!" "I have palaver!" And on and on.

But the big picture is found in another passage, Matthew 25: 14-30 We are to be stewards of all that God has given us. We are to work hard at making profit to give the King. An upright man will not let excuses get in his way.

4. Many, if not most, proverbs need to be "translated" to be appreciated.
Examples:

He who loves a pure heart and whose speech is gracious will have a king for his friend. (Proverbs 22: 11). Translation: Even the fon looks to those whom he can trust, and upon whom he can depend.

Better to live on a corner of a roof than to share a house with a quarrelsome wife. (Proverbs 25: 24). Translation: No marriage is better than a bad marriage.

General principles for studying Wisdom:

1. **In studying wisdom, read the whole book if it is short, or as much of the surrounding material as possible.** In wisdom, the context of one proverb or saying is also important.

Example: A key to the interpretation of Ecclesiastes, Solomon's understanding of "meaningless" is found in Chapter 11, verse 9 through chapter 12, verse 14. In these verses the writer points to God's judgment as the only event which ultimately means anything. So everything else is relatively "insignificant or "meaningless". (v. 13-14) "Now that all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil."

2. **Study wisdom terms, their meanings, and categories, as well as wisdom styles and literary modes.** Because wisdom became a literature, many of its terms came to have a set of carefully defined meanings, and because it is "vivid", it is often worded to be exaggerated. This will help a pastor keep in mind what the Bible says about being "wise" or "foolish", and help prevent misunderstanding. Example: What does the term "wise" mean in Proverbs 10: 5,8,13.

- In verse 5 it relates to knowledge of practical things, and the willingness to do what has to be done when it needs to be done.
- In verse 8 wisdom refers to humility, or teachability.
- And in verse 13 wisdom seems to involve a love that makes peace, and speaks accordingly.

3. **Follow the argument carefully in a wisdom discourse.** This principle logically follows from the first and second points. Example: Psalm 1 (A wisdom psalm) To quote only verse 6, and to say only that the Lord watches over his own is to misunderstand much of what the psalm is really saying. Here is its argument.

There are two paths in life: The path of righteousness, and the path of wickedness. One must choose to follow the path of the righteousness by avoiding the wicked, and delighting in God's law in which he continually meditates.(verses 1 and 2) He is fruitful in good times and bad; and whatever he turns his hand to prospers. The wicked are just the opposite. They are temporary; they will not stand up under God's inspection.(verses 3-5) All this

happens (verse 6) because the Lord watches over the way of the righteous. Such a man is blessed (verse 1).

Questions:

1. What are some African proverbs, or sayings that have meant a lot to you?
2. Do these proverbs express an attitude towards life that is compatible with being a Christian? How do we judge what is good wisdom, and what is bad wisdom?
3. Read Proverbs 10 and 11; write five (5) from these two chapters which mean a lot to you. Give the reason(s) why in the case of each proverb.
4. Tell how these proverbs could help you to make one decision that you are facing.

The Gospels

When it comes to using the Bible in ethical decisions, the four Gospels of the New Testament present one of the greatest, but most exciting challenges of all. Jesus' teaching often seems quite radical, and his life is admittedly unique. What are we to make of the teachings found in the Gospels? Throughout Christian history two streams of thought have emerged.

- The first, and generally the traditional viewpoint, says that what Jesus taught applied primarily to his life, and that as an ethic it was above the ordinary Christian. Thus two levels of Christian behavior developed in Christian thought: that of the ordinary, carnal Christian and that of the "saint", the almost perfect Christian.
- The second point of view assumes that the teaching of Jesus, (including the Sermon on the Mount, etc.) is the way that every Christian should and could live. In that sense it is "normative".

The problem revolves about many of the radical, or seemingly impossible teachings. Passages like Matthew 5: 27-29 illustrate the difficulty:

"You have heard that it was said, "Do not commit adultery. But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell."

The question is "What are we to make of this passage in ordinary life?" Are we to be like some of the early Egyptian monks who took the passage literally and

disfigured their bodies in the attempt to be perfect? With so much sexual immorality in the world this is not an idle question. Four points can be considered for interpreting such a remarkable passage.

1. Jesus' ethic always goes to the very center of man's heart and sinful predicament. Nothing less than perfection can satisfy the nature of Jesus' teachings. We must never weaken his instruction. It shows us who we are, and ultimately what it means to be perfect. In this sense what Jesus teaches belongs to him alone. He was the one without sin. Only he was absolutely self-consistent. Only he fulfilled the demands of the law of love. But the bigger picture of his teaching includes all believers. Jesus understands that he is urging his hearers to perfection. (Matthew 5:48) " Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." The New Testament does not have different standards of morality for different believers. All are urged towards perfection.
2. In stressing points Jesus often uses hyperbole (making something larger than life). Phrases like "You are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14); "Why do you look for a speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?"(Matthew 7:3); "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves." (Matthew 7: 15) point us towards the moral standards of a righteous God. There is practical guidance in these pictures, but we must not take them simply at face value. Such, it seems, is the case with Matthew 5: 29-30. If taken literally most Christians would be at least partially blind. If taken to be a picture, it means that we must be absolutely committed to being pure, and to avoid looking where we will be tempted to lust.
3. Even Jesus' words must be read together with other Scripture. Often Christians make the mistake of thinking that Jesus' words are more inspired than other parts of the Bible. This attitude is encouraged by such things as Bibles which have "Christ's words" in red. It is true that His words personally, clearly reveal the character and mind of God, and in fact, they focus on the central issues involved in living the Godly life. But they do not stand alone. They are interpreted and illustrated by the other parts of Scripture, for **the whole of Scripture is just as inspired as Jesus' words**. In 1 Corinthians 13: 3 Paul says "If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing." Clearly self-sacrifice must be combined with love, a love that changes everything.

4. Lastly, one must be aware that Jesus spoke to certain people, in specific circumstances, with specific commands. To the disciples he said "Come, follow me" and they left their nets; to the Demon-possessed man he said "Return home and tell how much God has done for you."(Luke 8:39) We need to study each of Jesus' teachings, to whom they were addressed, and how they apply to us. Some may directly speak to us; others may not.

Questions:

1. Jesus spoke some "hard sayings". Study Luke 9: 57-62 and list three difficult teachings. Answer these questions about these difficult teachings.
 - Do these teachings apply to all believers?
 - What do they mean in the African culture?
 - What do they mean to you?
2. In Luke 10: 3-10 Jesus gives instruction to his disciples.
 - What is the setting of these instructions.
 - What was his disciples to do?
 - What were the consequences of their obedience?
 - In what kind situation might Jesus' words apply today?
3. Do most Africans feel that the teachings of Christ are above them? How can we encourage them to listen and obey Jesus?

Paul's Writings

Many pastors and teachers teach largely from Paul's writings. This is not necessarily bad. Paul is a clear, practical thinker who teaches with the mind of Christ. He writes out of love and genuine concern for churches. But there are three potential problems: **He writes with a specific cultural perspective. He often writes to very difficult and complicated situations. (like the situation at Corinth). And his letters sometimes contain "things that are hard to understand"(2 Peter 3: 16).** We must remember points when we seek to understand Paul's ethics. Here are some general perspectives to keep in mind in interpreting Paul:

1. Paul is a Jew. His writings are rich in Old Testament thought, but are not bound to the Old Testament way of thinking. The Book of Galatians is an excellent example of this tension. In chapter 3 he argues for receiving the Holy Spirit through faith by quoting, or referring to Genesis, Deuteronomy, Leviticus, and Habakkuk.

2. Paul lives in a world influenced strongly by Greek culture. The Greeks were a people who rose to power before Christ was born, whose language, ways of living, and writing strongly influenced much of the Mediterranean world. The world he evangelized was mostly a Gentile, or non-Jewish world. The result was a church that contained both Jew and non-Jew, two groups of people who had very different customs. The problem of division, or divisions, within the Church was very real (Romans 14: 2-6).

3. But Paul also writes with each church in mind. Churches had different situations and different problems. Some problems were doctrinal, and some were moral. Paul always seeks to address those problems by explaining how the Truth corrects both our doctrinal **and** moral difficulties.

4. Paul often deals with matters that were being disputed within the church. Matters like women covering their heads (1 Corinthians 11); women speaking in church (1 Corinthians 14: 33-35); marriage practices (1 Corinthians 7), food sacrificed to idols (1 Corinthians 8), and so on. Many of these matters are still being debated by some Christians. In studying about these matters in Paul's writings keep in view these three principles:
 - First, watch for Paul's expression of his own opinion, like in 1 Corinthians 7:12 (compare with verse 10) "To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord):" This does not mean that Paul is wrong in his opinion. It simply means that Paul is consciously releasing us from being bound to his words as eternal truth.

 - Second, watch for Paul's use of custom as a precedent for the practice of the church (1 Corinthians 11:16). Again, this does not mean that he is wrong; it simply reflects that certain practices were common, and accepted in his time.

 - Third, examine the Scriptural or logical argument for his conclusions about the proper behavior. A important example of this occurs in the example cited above, 1 Corinthians 11. It seems that Paul is using a number of cultural perspectives in arguing for women covering their heads. "Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head"... "it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off"... "Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him?" In this case Paul is arguing by analogy (or culturally) from "**the very nature of things**". Do these arguments justify the practice as one that is meant for all times and places?

- Fourthly, is there a cultural or social situation that helps us make better sense of what Paul is teaching? Paul was writing to living and breathing people. It is helpful to try to understand what those people were going through. Often traditions are established to carry out a principle, for example, that of avoiding "every kind of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:22), in a particular setting. However, we should not let our ideas (or theories) about the background of a teaching deter us from following the clear, consistent teachings of Scripture.

Questions:

Study 1 Corinthians 11: 17-34 and answer the following questions.

1. What is the situation in the church?
2. What are the people actually doing wrong?
3. What are the consequences of their bad behavior?
4. What truth does Paul base his following instruction on?
5. How are the people to change their actions?
6. What is the practical insight, or solution, he gives that might help solve the problem.?

Apocalyptic Literature

The books of Daniel and Revelation (and some parts of Zechariah) are often called apocalyptic literature. This simply means that they are an unveiling, or a revealing, of the future and that which is hidden. Some people value these books for only their prophecy, but in truth they contain much more. They are examples of a kind of writing that has encouraged believers throughout the centuries. The reasons for this encouragement include the following:

1. God is sovereign. He controls the world, the heart of the king, and the events of history (Daniel 5:21). The climax of that sovereignty is found in Revelation "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever." (Revelations 11:15) A clear understanding of this enables the Christian to have the courage to do what is right.
2. The books provide us with examples of Godly, courageous living, Daniel being the most obvious example. But we should not overlook the saints mentioned in Revelation, those who suffered and died for Christ. These persons lived (and will live) in the light of God's victory over sin and the devil. We are encouraged to follow in their steps of faith. (See Hebrews 11)

3. These books give clear examples and teaching on Godly behavior. Among other things Daniel shows an **example** of a Godly man avoiding idolatry; Christ gives many **instructions** to the churches in Revelation 1-3, and admonishes the believer in many other places throughout the book (Revelations 13:9-10)

These books bring the whole picture of history into focus. I see my present temptation, and the way I should deal with them, in light of God's plan for history and the world. I see my Christian growth in light of the personal examples of those who have endured adversity and achieved victory in the walk of faith with God.

Questions:

Read Daniel 6 and answer the following questions:

1. As a Godly man, how is Daniel's character described?
2. What is the plot against Daniel? On what is that plot centered?
3. What is Daniel's crime?
4. How does God save Daniel?
5. What are the consequences of Daniel's faithfulness?
6. How does this all apply (Can we apply it?) to an African facing the problem of idolatry?

Read Revelation 2 and 3 and continue to answer these questions:

7. What is the sin of each of the seven churches?
8. Some people think that these churches are representative of the different ages of the church throughout history. Others believe that these churches represent all the kinds of Christian congregations through the years. Assuming that this last statement is at least partly true, which of these churches could be said to be the African church? Your church? The church in your village?
9. List the solution to each of the problems that the churches have.

Narrative

Lastly, a word must be mentioned about narrative, or the stories of Scripture. This is found in parts of Genesis, the Historical Books (I and II Samuel, etc., Ruth, etc.), and Acts. These books provide us with many, many examples. But not all these examples are examples of good behavior. The behavior of any person at any time **must be tested by the rest of Scripture**. We should not commit adultery just because David committed adultery. In all cases we need to follow the clear, direct teaching of Scripture using examples as illustrations that help us obey God.

Questions:

1. Give five illustrations from the Old Testament of sin. Give the Old Testament references that make those actions sin.
2. Give five illustrations, from all of the Bible, of obedience to God's law. Give the Scriptural references that the laws, or principles, that these people obeyed.

Conclusion

Good Christian ethics and good pastoring cannot be simply learned from a pastor, a teacher or a text book. It must be learned through action that is based on Scripture as a guide, and on the promises and power of God. Peter says "Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed." (I Peter 1:13)

In commanding this Peter may have had (partially) in mind the study of the prophets and the gospel he mentions in chapter 1 of his letter. However, after all our preparation is complete, we really complete our learning through acting on the truth, and expressing our faith through love. (Galatians 5:6)

And as we act in self-control, however, we are to be realistic about the results of our faithfulness here on earth. Peter says that we're to set our hope fully on the grace to be given to us when Jesus Christ is revealed. It seems, at least to this author, that there is a warning here to anyone who wants to live a genuine Christian life: Though we pursue that life, we will not be perfect here on earth. Our actions will fall short, and bring unexpected conclusions.

But nevertheless, we are not to be discouraged. We are no longer to live for ourselves, but for him who died for us and was raised again. (2 Corinthians 5:15) We are to avoid the evil desires which once controlled our lives, and we are to pursue holiness in all that we do. We are to pursue holiness because "he who called you is holy." We are holy because Christ has made us holy. (Hebrews 3:11) Holiness sets us apart from this world's way of thinking and doing; and holiness sets us apart for God. Ultimately, Christ's holiness will take us beyond this world to heaven. Holiness will be the way of life there.

Holiness is the final word, and the ultimate conclusion to the search for God's will in Africa.

Appendix I: The World of the New Testament

I. The Social Setting of the Greek World:

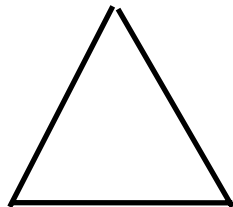
A. The polis was a “settled community whose citizen body was a small enough that individuals might interact freely within roles.” The key here is roles:

1. Rules of human associations fit together like pieces of a puzzle.
2. Based on the principles of friendship of *philia*, or friendship.
3. Made up of the “*demos*”, those property owning, free males and the *metoikoi*, or subordinates, that were the majority: women, slaves, resident aliens.
4. Ephesians 5: 22-6:9 relates these classes together: Wives-husbands, children-parents, slaves-masters.

B. The expansion of the polis required the development or enlarging of the current set of loyalties.

1. The world became larger, more complex and more pluralistic to the common person. Cultures converged on each other.
2. It was a time of comparing, assimilating, adding on to, and testing of ones ancestral traditions.
3. Philippians 4:8 “Finally, Brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things.”
4. Thus, men sought universals; and Rome claimed the divine commission to bring all men under “one law, eternal, immutable.”

C. The increasing stratification of society into separate social groups or ranks (Acts 16:7; Romans 13:7,8) produced a society with great inequities and tensions.



The Emperor, princeps, senators, knights, and aristocracy made up 1% or less of the population.

Appendix 2: John Stott, Social Ethics

I. The Evangelical Heritage of Social Concern:

- A. In recent times, began with John Wesley (d. 1791).
- B. Changed the face of British morality (Bready).
- C. After Wesley, included Granville Sharp, Thomas Clarkson, James Stephens, Zachary Macaulay...William Wilberforce...all belonging to the Clapham Parish Church, all part of the “Clapham Sect” or “the Saints”.
- D. In America Charles G. Finney fostered an impetus towards reform through his efforts in Evangelism as well as his efforts in :

- 1. Anti-slavery.
- 2. Economic assistance
- 3. Elimination of smallpox, malaria, leprosy- Northern
- 4. Abolishing forced labor in the Congo.
- 5. Resisted Blackbirding in the South Pacific.
- 6. Opposed opium in China
- 7. Opposed widow burning, infanticide, and temple prostitution in India.

II. The Change in Evangelical Social Concern:

- A. Reaction against theological liberalism.
- B. Reaction against the so-called “social gospel”.
- C. Widespread disillusion and pessimism following World War I.
- D. Scofield’s Bible teaching and popularism of the premillennial scheme.
- E. The spread of Christianity among a middle class which tended to identify it with its culture and emphasized the maintenance of the status quo.

III. The nature of the Church’s Mandate: According to the Lausanne Covenant: “social responsibility and sociopolitical involvement”.

- A. Was Jesus involved in politics? Yes-as in the art of living together in community.”
- B. Will genuine Christian action embrace both social action and social service? Yes.

Social Service

Relieving Human Need
 Philanthropic activity
 Seeking to minister to individuals and families
 Works of mercy

Social Action

Removing the causes of human need
 Political and economic activity
 Seeking to transform the structures of society
 The quest for justice

IV. Biblical Basis for Social Concern:

A fuller doctrine of

- God----Creator, Lawgiver, Lord, Judge.
- Humanity--Unique Worth
- Christ--Identified with us and calls us to identify with others.
- Salvation--Radical Transformation
- Church--Distinct from the World as its salt and light, yet penetrating it for Christ.

Notes from Eitel's Transforming Culture

Eitel Proposes five principles by which culture can be transformed. Some of these principles take the form of assumptions, or presuppositions, in the act of deciding what is right and wrong, worthy or unworthy.

1. Scripture is authoritative and normative in relation to ethical concerns.¹
2. Christians are not to do something willingly which they know would destroy their body.²
3. Christians are not free to do anything which offends the conscience of a brother in Christ.³
4. The system of spiritual headship, as the principle is know, means that the "head" in each relationship has the authority of God unless he negates his own position by expecting sin of others.⁴
5. Whatever one does in regard to ethical questions should, in the final analysis, glorify God.⁵

In a working format these principles can be expressed as five questions:

1. Does it violate any clear teaching of scripture?
2. Does it destroy any part of the individual's body (physically, mentally, or spiritually) as the temple of God's Holy Spirit?
3. Does it cause a weaker believer or non-believer to be hindered in coming closer to Christ?
4. Does it violate the express will of one's spiritual head?
5. Does it glorify God? Can God be asked to bless it with a clear conscience?"⁶

Question:

1. Are there any other biblical questions that should be asked when making a decision, or establishing a pattern of behavior?

Bibliography

Barnette, Henlee H. Introducing Christian Ethics. Nashville, Broadman Press, 1961.
 Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, Ethics. Translated by Neville Horton Smith and Edited by Eberhard Bethge. New York, MacMillan, 1955.

¹ Keith Eitel, Transforming Culture (Nairobi, Evangel Publishing House, 1986), 106.

² Ibid., 111.

³ Ibid., 117.

⁴ Ibid., 124-125

⁵ Ibid., 130-131.

⁶ Ibid., 133. The question approach is not unique to Eitel. He cites Kato's African Cultural Revolution and the Christian Faith as a source for a "question model".

Eitel, Keith. Transforming Culture. Nairobi, Evangel Publishing House, 1986.

Fee, Gordon D. and Douglas Stuart. How to Read the Bible For All Its Worth. Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1993.

Holmes, Arthur F. Ethics: Approaching Moral Decisions. Downers Grove, Inter-Varsity Press, 1984.

Kitto, H.D.F. The Greeks. London, Penguin Books, 1951.

Lewis, C. S. The Four Loves. London, Fontana Books, 1960.

Mattingly, Harold. The Man in the Roman Street. New York. W.W. Norton, 1966.

Schaller, Lyle E. The Change Agent. Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1972.

White, R.E.O. The Changing Continuity of Christian Ethics (Vol. 1): Biblical Ethics. Exeter, The Paternoster Press, 1979.

White, R.E.O. The Changing Continuity of Christian Ethics (Vol. 2): The Insights of History. Exeter, The Paternoster Press, 1981.

Notes

Notes