

Ethics

(having to do with right and wrong)

**are confused & contested
not so much at the values level
as at the "source" and "expression" levels.**

How we acquire
(social contract, natural law, God?)

What we affirm
(truth, justice, love, peace, etc)

How we apply
(politically, personally, etc.?)

CHRISTIAN ETHICS

Discerning right from wrong in an age of complicated circumstances with many options and opinions

Tentative Class schedule

1 Sept. 28	Is Christianity all about ethics? Eph.2:8-10
2 Oct. 5	Do we need Christian faith in ethics? Acts 17:22-28
3 Oct. 12	Is the Biblical God ethical? Rom.8:28-39
4 Oct. 19	Medical ethics (Charles Herbst will lead)
5 Oct. 26	What are the core virtues in Christian ethics? Eph.4:10-16
6 Nov. 2	How should we make moral decisions? Eph.4:17-32
7 Nov. 9	Whose morality becomes law?
8 Nov. 16	What are family values?
9 Nov. 23	Is capital punishment civilized?
10 Nov. 30	When is civil disobedience ethical?
11 Dec. 7	Should homosexuality be a moral issue?
12 Dec. 14	How are rich Christians to live in an age of hunger?
13 Dec. 21	Is abortion a civil rights issue?
14 Dec. 28	Conclusion

Steven Weinberg
(theoretical physicist)

"With or without religion, good people can behave well and bad people can do evil; but for good people to do evil—that takes religion."

Billy Graham

"There are few things worse than bad religion and there are few things better than good religion."

Ethics

**are important
but not as a cut flower
untethered to our Creator
the source of life.**

Ethics

Two questions

1. Can we reduce Christianity to ethics?
2. Do human ethical longings bear witness to God?

It is a popular understanding that the core of all religions, political ideologies, and philosophies is:



1. Can we reduce Christianity to ethics?

**The Kingdom
without the King**

**Shalom
without the Messiah**

1. Can we reduce Christianity to ethics?



**American
civil religion**



generic god
pluralism
freedom
justice
human rights

NOTE: This finds more traction with Jesus' Gospel of the Kingdom than Paul's Gospel of the Cross.

Distinguishing Jesus' Gospel from Paul's is vital to orthodox Christianity.

Ephesians 2

“8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”

The pattern of Paul's letters

Theology

“For by grace **you have been** saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God”

First section

Ethics

“**we are** . . . created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”

Second section

The order is consistent and significant

The pattern of Paul's letters

What Christ has done **for** us.

Our **position** in Christ by grace through faith

First section

What Christ is doing **in and through** us.

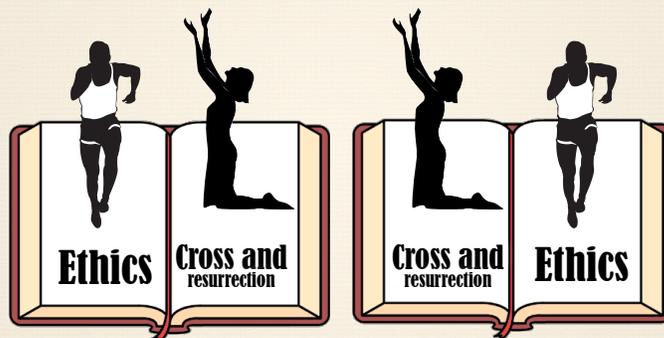
Our **behavior** in Christ by grace through discipline

Second section

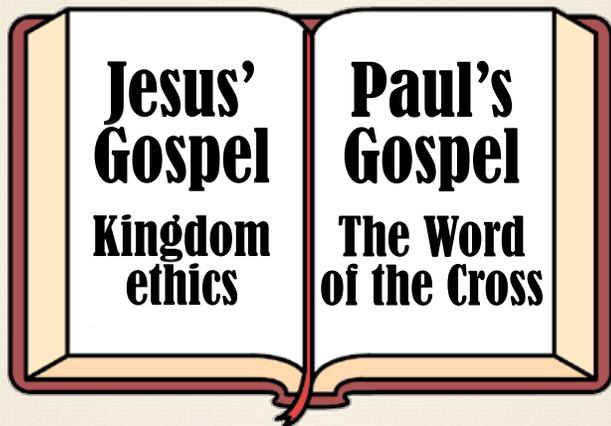
The order is consistent and significant

The pattern of Jesus' ministry

The pattern of Paul's letters



Jesus and Paul



The Gospel "of the Kingdom" is not found in Acts.

Luke 3:18

"So with many other exhortations he preached **the gospel** to the people."

Mark 1:14

"Jesus came to Galilee, preaching **the gospel of God**, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and **believe in the gospel.**'"

What exactly were they expected to believe?

1 Corinthians 15

"¹ Now I make known to you, brethren, **the gospel which I preached to you**, which also you received, in which also you stand, ² by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. ³ For I delivered to you as of **first importance** what I also received, that Christ **died** for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ and that He was buried, and that He was **raised** on the third day according to the Scriptures,"

Were John the Baptist, Jesus, & his disciples preaching this Gospel 3 years before the events?

Remember: Peter rejected the notion of Jesus' death in Matt.16:21-23.

To participate in the Kingdom one must (according to Jesus) -

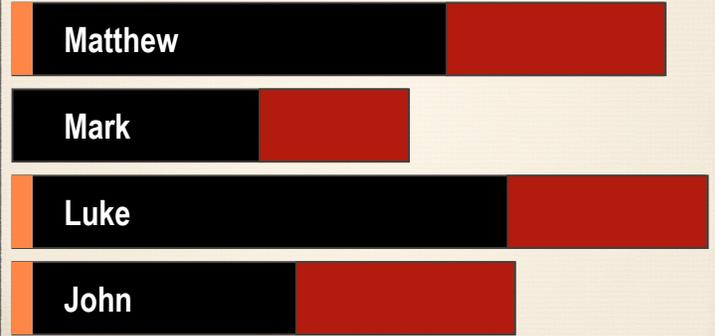
- ➔ **Matt.16:24** "Deny self" – make no provision for self.
- ➔ **Mk.8:38** "Not be ashamed of Jesus" – bold unapologetic witness.
- ➔ **Lk.14:26** "Hate your family" – put Christ above one's natural family.
- ➔ **Lk.14:33** "Forsake all and follow Jesus"
- ➔ **Lk.14:25-27** "Give up all possessions"
- ➔ **Matt.5:20** "Be perfectly righteous" – exceed the discipline of the Pharisees.

The Sermon on the Mount is full of warnings about failing to fulfill the spirit of the Law.

- ➔ **Matt.5:22-23** “whoever shall say ‘you fool’ shall be guilty enough to go into the hell of fire.”
- ➔ **Matt.5:29-30** “And if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you; for **it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.**
- ➔ **Matt.6:14-15** “For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But **if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.**”
- ➔ **Matt.7:19** “Every tree that does not **bear good fruit** is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

The emphasis of the Gospels

The Passion and Resurrection



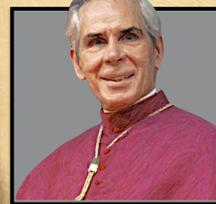
Gospels

The Passion and Resurrection

birth, teaching, miracles, deeds of Jesus

The emphasis of the Epistles

Epistles



Fulton J. Sheen

“Of all the great religious leaders of history, Jesus is unique in that he alone came for the purpose of dying.”

Observations

1. In Jesus’ teaching ethics addresses **a means to inclusion** in the Kingdom of God and is meant to prepare Jews for the Christ.
2. In Paul’s teaching ethics addresses a **worshipful response** to inclusion in the Body of Christ.

If we don’t see the difference we will invite a cut-flower Christianity that undermines the Gospel by placing the emphasis on what we must do rather than what Christ has done.

A cut-flower Christianity, which undermines the Gospel of the Cross -

loves the flower
(the Kingdom)

Jesus’ emphasis on the ethics of the Kingdom



deemphasizes its root
(The Cross & Resurrection)

Paul’s emphasis on the Cross & Resurrection



1. Can we reduce Christianity to ethics? NO!

2. Do human ethical longings bear witness to God? YES!

Ethics through the eyes of an atheist

American Atheists' Center

“Indeed, it appears as though the problem of establishing a natural, humanistic basis for ethical behavior is not much of a problem at all. **It is in our natures to desire love, to seek beauty, and to thrill at the act of creation.**

The complex maze we see when we examine traditional moral codes is largely the result of vain attempts to accommodate **human needs and nature** to the whimsical totems and taboos of the demons and deities who emerged with us from our cave-dwellings at the end of the Paleolithic Era - and have haunted our houses ever since.”

Morality is a universal human trait that cannot be denied.

“Morality exists outside the human mind in the sense of being not just a trait of individual humans, but a human trait; that is, a human universal.”

Michael Shermer (author of *The Science of Good and Evil*)

The only basis for ethics is the survival of DNA!

“Humans have always wondered about the meaning of life. . . life has no higher purpose than to perpetuate the survival of DNA . . . life has no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind pitiless indifference.”

Richard Dawkins (Atheist, evolutionary biologist)

The atheist is saying:

1. The root of human ethical impulses is nature, which seeks to preserve life (both quantity and quality).

2. The idea of God is confined to formal religious totems and taboos and not related to our nature.

Hierarchy of human needs

Abraham Maslow



Transcendence

Self actualization
- Cognitive / Aesthetic

Esteem needs
- respect from others

Belonging needs
- social security

Safety needs
- security for the future

Biological needs
- food & shelter

Hierarchy of human ethics

Fullness of Life

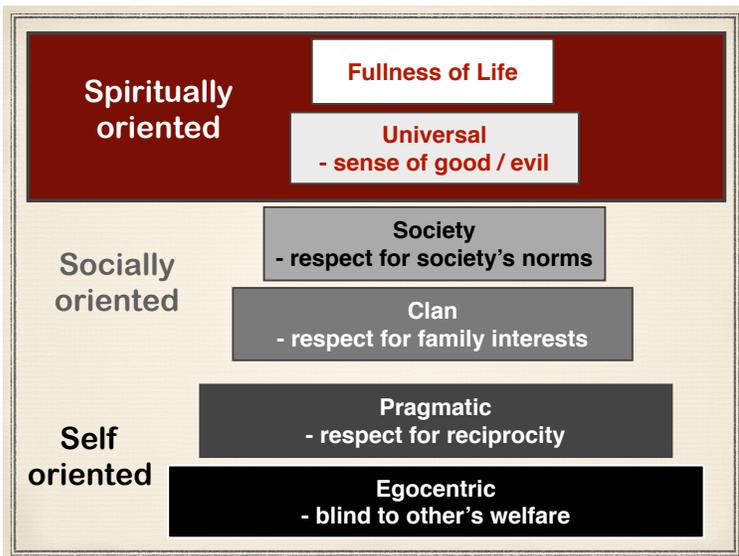
Universal
- sense of good / evil

Society
- respect for society's norms

Clan
- respect for family interests

Pragmatic
- respect for reciprocity

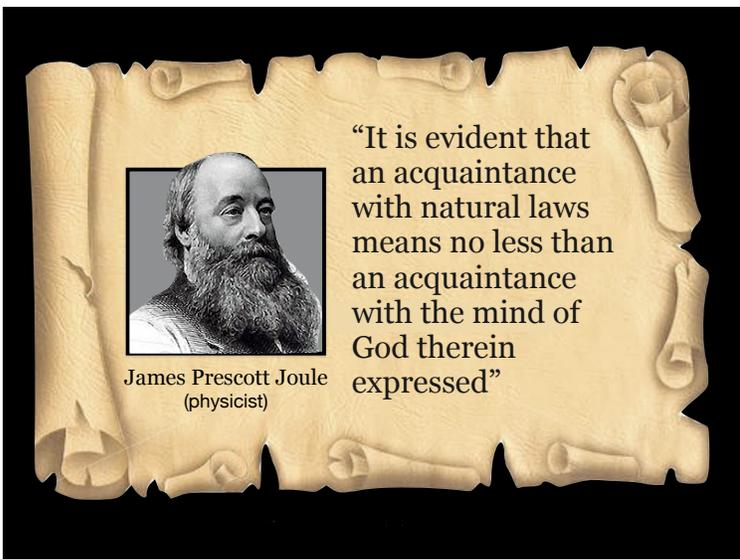
Egocentric
- blind to other's welfare



Romans 2:18-19

“¹⁴ For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, . . . ¹⁵ . . . they show the work of **the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them.**”

The shadow of God's image is in every human's soul as witnessed by a universal sense of an ethical conscience.



Why do humans commit suicide and animals do not?

Some people who seem to have every material blessing still feel so hopeless and empty that they kill themselves.

We need more than the preservation of our DNA to live.

We may have too much to live with and not enough to live for.

Logic for atheistic ethics

1. Evolutionary **self-preservation** is at the core of human behavior and ethics.
2. Enlightened self-interest results in **sophisticated** ethical commitments.
 - Altruism comes from an **imprinted attachments** to other humans.
 - Love, beauty, & art are the fruit of the ethics of self-interest and the essence of **peace & happiness that is the goal of life.**
3. Religion is an **unnecessary, harmful, mutation** of the natural process to find & preserve life.

Questions for the atheist

1. Is God's witness limited to formal religion?
2. Does the preservation of your DNA really satisfy your hunger for a deep sense of meaning (significance)?
3. Where does your longing for “abundant life” (self actualization, transcendence) come from?
4. Is it possible that you are suppressing the source of the life you are so eager to understand?

For Christians ethical living is an act of

worship.

Don't displace the true Christ with the false Messiah's of self achievement in ministry or

ethics.

For non believers ethical longings are a call to

worship.

Your need and longing for life is inspired by more than preservation of DNA they come from a deeply embedded image of God.

A fundamental difference between Sacred and Secular Ethics

One is a search for life.

The other is a response to life.

Non believers are called to get it together

Believers are called to keep it together

