

Ethics

Lesson Four

How Should We Then Live?

(Will We Honor the Perfect Design of the Divine Designer?)

In 1973, a Supreme Court decision (“Roe v. Wade”) made abortion legal in the United States. The decision doomed multiple millions of unborn children to never see life. Three years after this law was established, Francis Schaeffer, a renown theologian, philosopher and pastor, wrote his classic book, titled, “How Should We Then Live?” Today we still ask the same question. It’s a question that challenges every Christian to deeply consider his or her personal ethics. Francis Schaeffer’s question goes to the heart of the ethical battles we face today. If each of us personalized the question, it might be this:

“How should I then, or perhaps more importantly, “How *will* I then live... and by whose ethical standards will I answer these questions?”

Drs. Norman and David Geisler, wrote a book, titled, “Conversational Evangelism: Connecting with People to Share Jesus.” They wrote, “...*the world we live in has changed in ways that often create barriers to the Gospel.*”¹ We could paraphrase this to say the world’s cultural and ethical norms have evolved in ways that create barriers to God-pleasing Christian living. The Geislers give three reasons why this is true in this increasingly sin darkened world. (I have partially paraphrased these.)

First Barrier - “The Rejection of Moral Absolutes:” Much of the world we live in has normalized a relativistic values system.” Compassion for one’s neighbor has been qualified by the societal redefinition of who our neighbors are. Compassion has been redefined that it is now a part of an altered moral compass the world widely accepts. This is because in many social units or cultures, morals are relative to each person’s opinions and feelings. God is eliminated from the equation.”

Godless ethics consider the message of the Gospel to be unfairly judgmental and prejudiced. Christianity is seen as no better than any other belief system, religious or not. If we swallow the lie that morals are defined and governed by our feelings about the situations in which each of us finds ourselves, our basis

¹ This excerpt is from an article, originally published in [Southern Seminary Magazine](#) (Fall 2016, 85:2).

for ethics is shaky, weak and will crumble. We have rejected moral absolutes and thus, the inerrancy and value of the Bible.

Second Barrier - “Skepticism Toward Truth:” There is increasing skepticism, particularly in the academic world, with the authority and truth of the Bible. This has led many to question or disbelieve the truth about the life and times of the historical Jesus.

The life, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus is historically and inherently accurate. Without the incarnation and its historic authenticity, there is no basis for Christian ethics. Then, ethics of any kind can be formed and repeatedly reformed without reference to God, who is the only higher, divine authority. Skepticism of this makes ethics nothing more than an empty container, waiting to be filled with whatever works for someone or some group. Thank God the historic Jesus is real. Skepticism toward this truth will destroy any culture that scorns it.

Third Barrier - “An Indifference Toward Truth:” The world has developed an indifference to truth in general... Thus, it’s fine for anyone to base their ethics on anything they want. It does not matter if it’s quite different for someone else’s beliefs. Essentially, ‘my view’ or “our view” is the only view that counts.”²

If we don’t have the fear of the Lord that comes from believing that Jesus is the truth (John 14:6), we swallow the lie that your truth can be your truth, and mine can be mine. We scorn the possibility that there is a God who is the Truth giver.

Let’s recap these three attitudes that are empty and lead nowhere except to sin, confusion and destruction. They are: [1] Rejection of moral absolutes; [2] Skepticism toward the truth; and [3] Indifference toward truth. Together, they make up the devil’s formula for a seething pot of poison that’s easily swallowed.

Proverbs 14:12 (ESV)

“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.”

Again. “How should we then live?” ...And perhaps a more relative question for today should actually be broken down into these three questions:

[1] “How should we, (and perhaps more importantly), [2] how will we live... and [3] by what ethical standard will we live?”

² Partially quoted and paraphrased from: Andrew F Mulcahy – A Doctoral Thesis submitted to NCIU, “A CASE STUDY: CAN ON-LINE ALPHA BE AS AN EFFECTIVE WAY OF REACHING THE LOST AS A TRADITIONAL ALPHA COURSE?” December 2, 2020, P.5, New Zealand. His source Geisler, See footnote 2.

These questions should drive us freshly to the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. There, we ought to thank God for His grace and loving mercy. Without reservation or doubt, Christ is the Truth and our ethical standards are based on Him. Acts 17:28 (ESV) tells us, *“In him we live, move and have our being.”* Christ has set us free. The world’s opinion would deny this and try to convince us that Christ is not who He said He was and our followership of Him is a meaningless fraud. That is the worst, eternally damning fraud the world tries to foist on itself.

1 Corinthians 15:12-19 (ESV)

*“Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? {13} But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. {14} And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. {15} We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. {16} For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. {17} **And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. {18} Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. {19} If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.”***

Masterfully Empowered to Live a Beautiful Life

As Christ-followers, we have been given the spiritual understanding to walk in God-given, ethical patterns. The Lord has masterfully empowered us to live beautifully blessed lives, and as we do, to be a blessing to others. He has empowered us to confidently walk through the ethical difficulties, challenges and opportunities of life. How we live should be a strong and effective witness for ethical, successful living. The Apostle Paul firmly grasped this. It’s evident in his Epistle to the Ephesians, in which Paul warns us that our witness for the Lord and our successes in life can be diminished or worse, by unwise living.

Ephesians 5:15-17 (ESV)

“Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, {16} making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. {17} Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”

The pressures of contemporary living will attempt to bait us to water down our sense of ethics. These pressures may not seem of consequence until you find yourself living outside the safety of the scriptural boundaries God established. Then, the winds of our world's social evolution will blow where they wish. If we set our sail to follow these unfettered winds, and step over the ethical guidelines God provides us, we will be subject to wherever these winds take us... and they may turn into storms.

Once having sailed into these ethical storms, we're marked by the demands they carry. They will entice us to go ever further beyond the scriptural boundaries that keep us wise and alert to the dangers of the harsh winds of social syncretism. This is all part of the battle for our minds. It's a battle as old as the Garden of Eden. The Book of James first describes how the process of this battle works to take us down. James also gives us a warning, followed by the truth about God's constant dependability to help us avoid the bait. Here's James' description of the baiting process and its outcome, along with his warning.

James 1:13-17 (ESV) – The Process of the Ethical Trap

“Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. {14} But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. {15} Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. {16} Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. {17} Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”

Wise, ethical living draws our Heavenly Father's attention. He's concerned with not just helping us avoid wrong choices, but also with rewarding wise honorable ones. It's our own carnal desires to entertain the world's ethics that entrap us. It only succeeds when we choose to cooperate with “the new normal” and embrace its ethics. We are not to be ignorant. Don't take the bait! It's a deadly snare Satan wants to strangle you with. Hold tightly to biblical ethics and they will hold tightly to you. Stay rooted and grounded in the wisdom of God's unchanging Word. Never accept the temptation to wear the devil's straightjacket! God has a crown and a royal robe, waiting just for you.

Here are distinct points to holding tightly to the ethics God's Word gives us:

- Christian ethics instill and even demand that our interactions with others demonstrate God’s will and His love. We can conclude that our ethics should always be interpersonal and relational, both to people and to God.
- Christian ethics also demand that when personal sacrifice is an opportunity to show someone else the way, we must do what’s necessary. We must do it motivated by love... and without any intent to compromise the Word of God.
- Christian ethics and the opportunities it offers us require that we look to God to illuminate and safeguard the direction our lives take. The light of His presence brightens our way as nothing else can. Therefore, the brilliance of His presence really cannot be separated from ethical Christian living.

These three points become welcome additions to the guideposts that define the answer to “How should we then live?” There’s no better way to declare our love for God than valuing the ways we live among others. There’s a beautiful example in nature that gives a picture of this.

A Dandelion Blowing in the Wind

Let’s compare God-honoring ethics to one of His beautiful creations. Picture a mature dandelion. It has turned its bright yellow flower into a cloudlike collection of soft gray feathery seed carriers. The late summer winds blow and its cloud of seeds are scattered, landing wherever the winds takes them. The seeds now take root, bringing a fresh season of life where they land. From even a few dandelions can come a glorious field of beauty that covers the land. Will you allow yourself to go where the wind of the Holy Spirit will take you? When you land and take root, will you bring beauty to what was barren? Like the simple beauty of the dandelion, will you joyfully reflect the light of the Son of God? What could be more brilliant, gleaming and life-giving? If it’s not you, displaying and propagating your Christian ethics, then who will it be?

As with the dandelion seeds, the wind of the Holy Spirit will take us to where the beauty of our ethical journeys brings significance to the seasons of our lives. We can find joy in knowing we have glorified God where He has taken and then planted us. Is there any better choice? Of course not! A God-honoring, God pleasing ethical life will bring His kind of love as a gift to others. It’s the perfect design of the Divine Designer. What could be more satisfying and worthwhile?

Romans 12:2 (The Passion Translation)

“Stop imitating the ideals and opinions [and ethics] of the culture around you, but be inwardly transformed by the Holy Spirit through a total reformation of how you think. This will empower you to discern God’s will as you live [an ethically] ...beautiful life, satisfying and perfect in his eyes.”

The “New Normal” - Culturally Cancelled Sexual Ethics

Every society regulates (or deregulates) sexual ethics, and therefore its sexual practices. Until recent history, publicly accepted boundaries of sexual preferences and practices were narrow. Though alternative lifestyles were there, they were usually kept from public scrutiny. This is no longer the case in most societies, including America. The current progressive, liberal Western “cancel culture” has tried to erase our historic Judeo-Christian sexual ethics. This begs the question, by whose sexual ethics will we then live?

The floodgates have opened, just as they did in early Greek and Roman cultures. Fornication, cohabitation, adultery, gender redefinition, gender shifting, same-sex relationships and one gender-marriage are now called normative in much of our world. It’s even acceptable to invent genders that have no basis except someone’s personal whim. In spite of all this, there still remains a measure of historic taboos regarding sexual preferences and practices. Even the most fundamentally moral taboos are at risk of being changed or cancelled. Here’s what William Stevens wrote about the historically universal taboo against incest in his book, “The Family in Cross-Cultural Perspective.”

“Incest taboos come close to being a true cultural universal... All known societies extend incest taboos beyond the nuclear family; yet the patterning of these extensions - which relatives are taboo and which are not - is [becoming] subject to a good deal of intercultural variation.”³

Nothing will be sacred in our fallen, sin-soaked social structures. Satan will never be satisfied. He is intimately involved in this attempt to pervert and destroy the God-given beauty of our physical intimacies. We are heading for another “Babylon” (as Revelation Chapter 18 describes it). Looking ahead to the last days before the Second Coming of Christ, John the Revelator wrote this about the “Babylon” of the future. It seems an apt description of today:

Revelation 18:3a, 5 (ESV)

³ William N. Stephens, The Family in Cross-Cultural Perspective, New York, 1963, P. 260.

“For all nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality... {5} for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.”

Hateful Public Shaming and Accusations of Guilt

Hateful public shaming, accusations of guilt and a host of other destructive forces, too numerous to catalogue, now are becoming the “new normal.” They are seizing a position of public respectability. Immorality has bypassed and trashed the ethic of decency.

- Ethical Christianity has been attacked by a large number of revisionist social, political and communications structures. (this even happens in the church.)
- The script is flipped. Previously accepted normative moral standards are now denigrated, demeaned and dispatched as unfair and unacceptable. Historically normal standards of decency are now called insensitive, intolerable acts. They are publicly proclaimed as vile, and worthy of condemnation. Even violence is justified as a “righteous response” to all of this.

2 Corinthians 2:10b (The Passion Translation)

“...when I’m surrounded with troubles on every side and face persecution because of my love for Christ - I am made yet stronger. For my weakness becomes a portal to God’s power.”

Here is a news report about a prominent ethics battle, when elements of our politically correct culture tried to publicly and deliberately shame a godly man for standing on his Christian beliefs. The report describes how God’s people typically face an assault today on our Christian culture. (I have shortened the report and to some measure have paraphrased it.)

Holding Fast to Christian Ethics A Court Ruling in Colorado (paraphrased)⁴

“There was a baker who owned a shop in Colorado [Masterpiece Bakery]. On religious grounds, he refused to bake a wedding cake for two homosexual men. One of them said this: “Being denied service by [the baker] was offensive and dehumanizing especially in the midst of arranging what should be a joyful family celebration.” They complained to the state.

⁴ See the author’s book, “A Culture of Honor – A Culture of God,” © 2020, Robert Abramson, Page 159.

...Longstanding Colorado state law prohibits... businesses [such as this man's the bakery], from refusing service based on factors such as race, sex, marital status or sexual orientation. The two men filed complaints with the Colorado Civil Rights Division (CCRD). They contended that Masterpiece Bakers had violated this law. [An administrative judge] in Colorado ruled that the Christian baker was in violation of the state's antidiscrimination law. An attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union of Colorado commented, "It's important for all Coloradans to be treated fairly by every business that is open to the public - that's good for business and good for the community."⁵

It was an ethics battle, and an assault on the baker's religious freedoms. The state tried to deny his Christian ethics. It became a greater battle for the baker's constitutionally mandated rights. He'd made a spiritual choice. He would not dishonor God by making the cake that went beyond the God-given boundaries of His belief system. The state courts left no room for him to join in or agree with what the Bible clearly describes as an unholy action.

The Christian baker found himself in an uphill fight. Because he stood on his religious principles, he could not come into agreement with what he saw as the state's sin of redefining his ethics and forcing them on others. In spite of the state court's unjust judicial decision, the baker stood firm. He was sure he was being led by the Holy Spirit. (Romans 8:14)

There is more to the story. The baker took his fight to a higher authority, knowing he was walking according to the Spirit and under the protection of God, who is the highest Authority! Godly lawyers came to his defense and took the case all the way to the Supreme Court of the United States. It's the highest court in America. Here's an excerpt, quoted from a news report of the Supreme Court's ruling.

"The Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Colorado baker. He stood firm on his refusal to make a custom cake for a same-sex couple, because he believed doing so would violate his religious beliefs. This was one of the most anticipated decisions of the term, and it was relatively narrow: Although [the baker] prevailed, the opinion by Justice Anthony Kennedy rested largely on the majority's conclusion that the Colorado administrative agency that ruled against Phillips treated him unfairly by being too hostile to his sincere religious beliefs. [Did you catch that?] The opinion seemed to leave open the possibility that in a future case, a service provider's sincere

⁵ <https://aclu-co.org/court-rules-bakery-illegally-discriminated-against-gay-couple/>

religious beliefs might have to yield to the state's interest in protecting the rights of same-sex couples. ...The majority did not rule at all on one of the central arguments in the case - whether compelling [the baker] to bake a cake for a same-sex couple would violate his right to freedom of speech."⁶

[The] story did not end there. The State of Colorado came back again and tried another way to persecute him, but the Supreme Court severely reprimanded them.

Galatians 6:7-9 (ESV)

"Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. {8} For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. {9} And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up."

Romans 10:11 (ESV)

For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame."

We do not deny or discount the injustices we have historically heaped on each other. We have seen ruthless discrimination, both public and private, as people continue to seize and hold their advantage over others. This evil is part of the move afoot today to radically change the ethical norms we historically have enjoyed as Christians. It's fundamental to the battle of good and evil. Let's be alert and not ignorant of Satan's devices. Among his most effective lately has been this attack the Christian ethics in which we so strongly believe.

This demonic assault has made its way into the church. Entire denominations and uncounted independent churches have surrendered to the assault. They have been shamed into feeling guilty, and have changed their publicly stated views of what is moral and right.

Attempting to redefine or practice scriptural revisionism is nothing new. This apostasy and hypocrisy has been with here for two millennia. Those who endorse or teach this distortion of Scripture will be accountable! The Scripture declares the church is where repentance and change is to begin. (1 Peter 4:17)

⁶ An excerpt from the report: <http://www.scotusblog.com/2018/06/opinion-analysis-court-rules-narrowly-for-baker-in-same-sex-wedding-cake-case/>

The Breeding Ground of Political Correctness

The so-called “awakened” or “woke” community’s accusations of intolerances are heaped upon the heads of those who stand for historic biblical righteousness. As it was in biblical times, we need a prophetic voice today, and it must come from the church... and also within each of us.

“Political correctness” gets bolder by the day. It does this to achieve forced compliance with a particular group’s “ethos.” This term means a group’s exclusive view of their customs, habits, character or disposition. In today’s Western cultures, this group considers itself “woke” as part of a superior intellectual culture. You may not like the comparison, but political correctness is just another satanic scheme to enslave those who it tries to shame. Christ rejects this. He offers us the gift of equality and the opportunity to see ourselves as God sees us. The truth is, shame is not your portion. You are a Christian and have freedom in Christ. (Romans 8:1, 10:11... and Psalm 25:1-3 ESV)

How should we then live? God’s kingdom is not political. It’s not a democracy. We are graced by having a divine loving King. He sees you with eyes of compassion. He stretched out his hands to be nailed to a cross, so He can now stretch out His love to you. You are fearfully and wonderfully created. You are a child of the Most High. You are free from the lies that would convince you to surrender your identity in Christ. The Bible is clear. It warns against those who have knowledge of the truth and twist it or turn their backs on it.

2 Peter 2:20-22 (ESV)

*“For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. {21} **For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them.** {22} What the true proverb says has happened to them: “The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire.”*

A lie is a lie, no matter how you try to bend it to resemble truth.
Will we reject the perfect design of the Divine Designer? Or, will we honor the Truth that has set us free?

This ends our fourth lesson on New Testament Christian ethics.