

# Christian Thought

Renewing our minds for the love of God

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Bryant Street Baptist Church

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## Description

God says that in order to “not be conformed to this world,” you must be “transformed by the renewal of your mind” so that you may discern his will (Romans 12:2). What is the role of reason in everyday life? How can we use critical thinking to navigate our choices? In this class, we will explore the life of the mind by discussing ethics, principles of logic, faith and reason, and divine attributes.

## Theme verse

**Romans 12:2** — Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

## Schedule

### Part 1: The God of Wisdom

- |                                       |            |
|---------------------------------------|------------|
| 1. Logos: God’s Wise Nature           | January 18 |
| 2. The Simplicity & Perfection of God | January 25 |
| 3. Logic: Thinking Wisely             | February 1 |

### Part 2: Ethics

- |  |             |
|--|-------------|
| 4. Human Nature & Natural Law          | February 8  |
| 5. Virtue: Practicing Wisdom           | February 15 |
| 6. The Common Good in Church & Society | February 22 |

## Resources

Books, articles, and videos will be posted on my website (see below).

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## PART 1: THE GOD OF WISDOM

### Lesson I

### Logos: God's Wise Nature

#### Questions

- Is God subject to logic?
- Is a command good because God wills it or does he will it because it is good?
- What is the foundation of morality or of logic?

#### Logos

##### John 1:1–3

In the beginning was the Word (*logos*),  
 and the Word was with God,  
 and the Word was God.  
 He was in the beginning with God.  
 All things were made through him,  
 and without him was not any thing made that was  
 made.  
 In him was life,  
 and the life was the light of men.  
 The light shines in the darkness,  
 and the darkness has not overcome it.

#### Logos (λόγος):

Word, speech, account, argument, order, reason, intelligibility, law (in the sense of order or structure).

\*Note: John wrote this in Greek adopting Greek philosophical language to incorporate what was right and correct what was wrong, e.g. Stoics.

#### Romans 1:19–20

<sup>19</sup>For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. <sup>20</sup>For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.

##### Genesis 1:1–3, 26, 28; 2:7

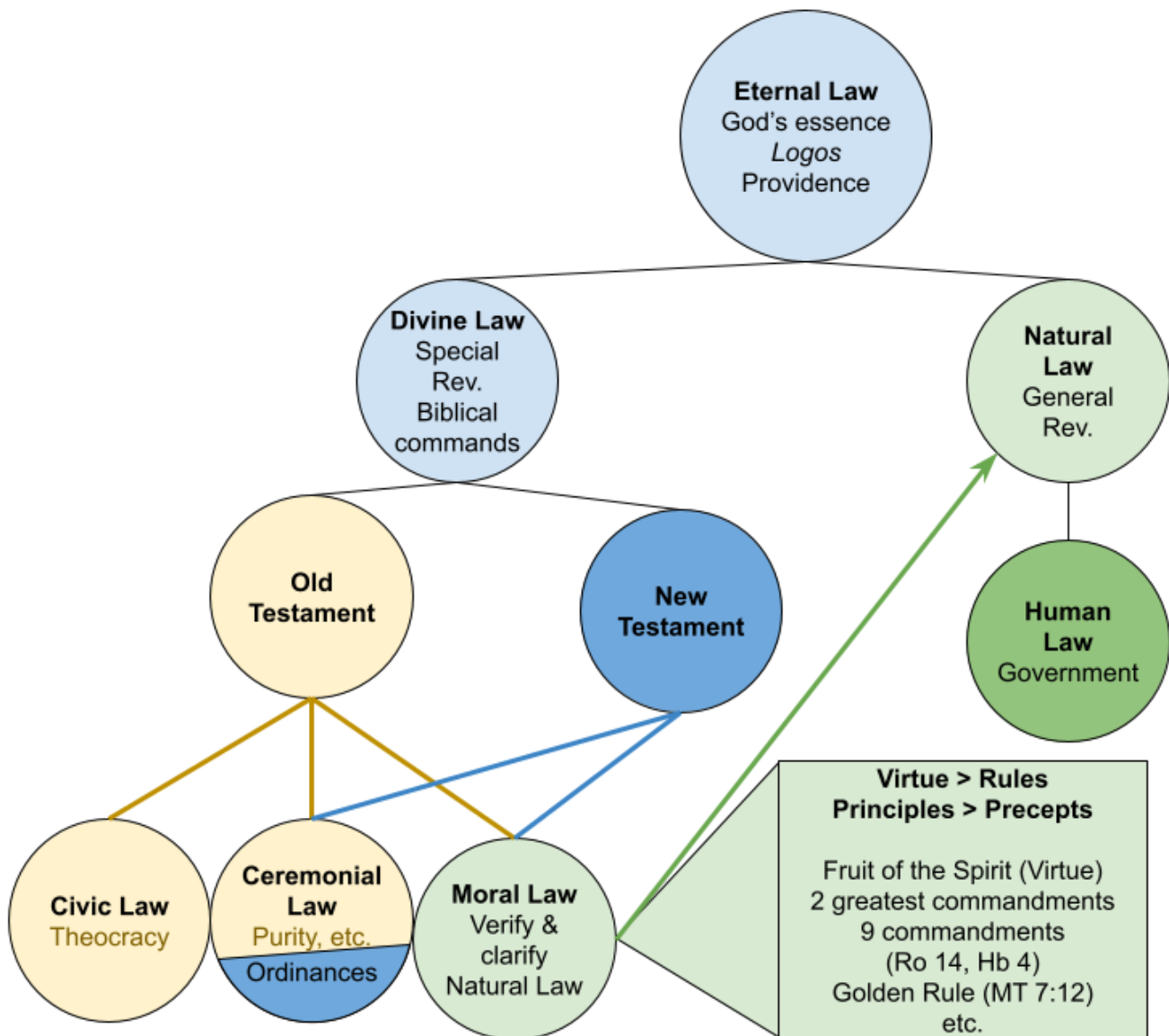
In the beginning,  
 God created the heavens and the earth.  
 The earth was without form and void,  
 and darkness was over the face of the deep.  
 And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of  
 the waters.  
 And God said, “Let there be light,”  
 and there was light.  
 And God saw that the light was good.  
 And God separated the light from the darkness

<sup>26</sup>Then God said,  
 “Let us make man in our image,  
 after our likeness.  
 And let them have dominion ...  
 over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth

<sup>28</sup>And God said to them,  
 “Be fruitful and multiply  
 and fill the earth and subdue it,  
 and have dominion over ... every living thing

<sup>2:7</sup>The LORD God formed the man of dust from the  
 ground  
 and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life,  
 and the man became a living creature.

## Types of Law



**General Revelation:** God's self-revelation in creation.

**Special Revelation:** God's self-revelation in the Bible. Illustration: Instruction book vs. device.

**Law:** (1) Providence, Eternal Law; (2) Divine Law (special revelation); (3) Moral law (natural law); (4) instruction; (5) Pentateuch. Delight in the law of the Lord (Ps 1:1) can mean any of these.

**Euthyphro Dilemma Answers:****A. It is good because God wills it (wrong).**

God's will becomes arbitrary. Leads to relativism. We cannot use reason to understand & grow in wisdom. God's nature is arbitrary & unknowable. This leads to **Divine Command theory**, e.g. Islam.

**B. God wills it because it is good (wrong).**

God is limited & subject to something higher. This undermines the moral argument for the existence of God.

**C. Essentialism (Historic Christian View).**

God doesn't have goodness, wisdom, etc. as attributes. God IS the good (Mk 10:18). God IS the Logos (Jn 1:1). God IS love (1 Jn 4:7-8). These are his essence (divine simplicity). They are what he is. When creation exhibits goodness, order, and wisdom, it reflects the character of its Maker. This allows intelligent design or moral arguments for the existence of God. Having wisdom is imitating God's mind. The fruit of the Spirit is a list of virtue, godly character traits that imitate Christ.

**Ethics is...**

... the study of the natural law order God created human nature to follow, which is based on God's own eternal nature. This looks like imitating the character of Christ in the virtues of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22–23). Commands or rules are not meant to *create* morality, but to *communicate* it, contrary to Divine Command Theory (Gal 3:24–26).

**Logic is...**

... (1) the order inherent in the mind of God; (2) the intelligible structure of the universe, which is based in the nature of God; (3) the study of these, which sometimes includes manmade systems and tools to represent intelligible structure.

**Conclusion**

God is not above or below reason (logic) or ethics. His very nature defines reason & goodness. The renewing of our minds (Ro 12:2) involves growing in wisdom by thinking God's thoughts after him and ultimately coming to know him (Phil 3:10).

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## Lesson II: The Simplicity & Perfection of God<sup>1</sup>

### Recap

- **Logic** is the order in the mind of God and the order he puts into creation.
- **Types of Law in the Bible:** Eternal Law (Providence), Natural Law (the way God designed humans to function), Divine Law (commands in the Bible), and Human Law (based on NL).
- **Logic & Ethics:** We study logic (proper reasoning about truth) and Ethics (morality and goodness) in order to grow in wisdom and thinking about our choices. This must start from thinking about how Truth, Goodness, and other attributes find their source in God's nature.

**Note:** Philosophy is necessary when interpreting the Bible because “it is not simply a matter of reading what the text says, but of finding a principled way to harmonize the texts and to work out their implications in rigorous ontological [metaphysical] terms.”<sup>2</sup>

### A. Why study Divine Simplicity?

**Divine Simplicity:** God is an undivided unity not composed of parts, aspects, or attributes.

- Thomas Aquinas (AD 1225–1274) says, “God is in nowise composite, but is altogether simple.”
- John Calvin (AD 1509–1564) says, “The essence of God is simple and undivided, and he contains all in himself, without portion or derivation, but in integral perfection” (*Institutes of the Christian Religion* 1.8.2.)

1. **It makes God more beautiful.** “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known” (1 Cor 13:12).
2. **It gives us hope.** God's unchangeable nature is anchored in divine simplicity. God tells us that “the unchangeable character of his purpose” is anchored in his unchangeable nature, which should give us “strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us” Heb 6:17–18).
3. **It's a foundational doctrine.** Like the foundation of a house, without divine simplicity you can't have most other doctrines of God. It also guards against heresies.

- |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| • Monotheism (singularity, Dt 6:4)   | • Aseity (necessity, autonomy, independence; Ex 3:14)                                     | • Transcendence (Isa 55:8–9)                    |
| • Trinity as one substance (Mt 28:19)  | • Immutability (changless; Nm 23:19; 1 Sam 15:29; Ps 102:26–27, 121:4; Mal 3:6; Isa 40:8) | • Goodness / Perfection (Mt 5:48; Mk 10:18)     |
| • Deity of Christ (Col 2:9)  | • Impassibility (God doesn't experience pain, pleasure, emotion)                          | • Omnipotence (Job 42:1–2; Isa 43:13; Mt 19:26) |
| • Eternality (Ps 90:2; Rv 1:8)   | • Incorporeal / immaterial (no body; 1 Kngs 8:27, 18:20–40; Jn 4:24)                      | • Omniscience (Ps 139:4, 147:5; 1 Jn 3:20)      |
| • Sovereignty (Prv 16:33; 1 Tim 6:15)  |   | • Omnipresence (Ps 139:7)                       |
| • Pure actuality & perfection (no unactualized potential for growth, active & not static or passive; Ps 121:4) |   | • First Cause (Col 1:16–17)                     |
|  |   | • etc.  |

<sup>1</sup> See *The Lord is One: Reclaiming Divine Simplicity*, eds. Joseph Minich and Onsi A. Kamel (Davenant Press, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> James Duguid, “Divine Simplicity and the Old Testament,” *The Lord is One*, 10.

## B. What is Divine Simplicity?

**Definition:** God is an undivided unity not composed of parts, aspects, or attributes.

**Explanation:** In composites, the existence of the parts are metaphysically prior to the whole, and some principle outside the composite must explain why the parts have been united. Usually this “outside” principle is God, since all things that are composites are created things.

**How do we learn about God:** God is transcendent and infinite, so he is beyond our full comprehension. The Bible describes him by...

1. **Negation** compared to us (e.g. infinite, immaterial).
  2. **Analogy**, anthropomorphism, and relation to (analogical) similarities in humans (e.g. hands of God, “regret”) (comparisons may be univocal, equivocal, or analogical).
  3. **Effects**. Creating tells us about the creator. Causing change in our lives & the world shows us his will and character.
  4. **Positive Descriptions**: Special revelation (Scripture) alone tells us positive descriptions (e.g. God is a Trinity).
- Anselm of Canterbury (AD 1033–1109) says, “Every composite that subsists requires the things from which it is composed, and it owes *that it is* [the cause of its existence] to those things. For whatever it is, it is by those things, and those things do not exist by it” (*Monologion* 17).
- Aquinas says, “Things which are many according to themselves, would not convene into one unless they were united by something composing” (*Summa Contra Gentiles* I.18.4).

**God is ... & is not composed of ...:**

1. **His Existence • Essence & Existence:** For composites *what* it is doesn’t explain *whether it exists*, but God exists by definition as necessary & autonomous (aseity).
2. **His Nature/Essence • Essence & Subject:** Humans have universal human nature individuated in individual people. “Paul” is not identical with “human nature,” but God is his nature, deity self-subsisting.
3. **Identical with his attributes/perfections • Essence & Attributes:** All God’s attributes are God, and are essential, not incidental, accidental, or superadded to his nature. He does *not have* love, goodness, justice, and reason. He *is* them, by nature, and his nature defines them.
4. **Incorporeal • Form & Matter:** God is immaterial, incorporeal, & not limited by quantity or magnitude.
5. **Etc.**

### C. Trinity:

#### How does Divine Simplicity apply to the Trinity?

**Definition:** God is one substance and three persons. All three persons are fully God, one God, and of the same essence. Anything attributed to one person is ultimately attributed to God.

- **Nicene Creed (AD 325, 381):** I believe in one God, the Father Almighty... And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God... very God of very God... And I believe in the Holy Ghost... who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified..."
- **Chalcedonian Definition of Christ's nature (AD 451):** "...our Lord Jesus Christ is... in Two Natures unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably... the properties of each Nature being preserved and both concurring into One Person and One Hypostasis..."

**Heresies:** Pantheism, Tritheism / Polytheism, Unitarianism (denial of three persons), Arianism (Jesus is not divine), Apollinarianism (Jesus is divine mind inhabiting human body), Docetism (Jesus's body is an illusion), Sabellianism (three modes of expression), Nestorianism (Christ is two persons), Monophysitism (divine nature but not human nature), etc.

### D. God's Attributes:

#### How does Divine Simplicity apply to God's attributes?

- Aquinas explains: "Every effect [i.e., creation, movement] not equalling the power of the cause acting [i.e. creator, mover] receives a similitude of being [analogical being] not according to the same reason, but deficiently, so that what is in the effect dividedly and multiply is in the cause simply and in the same way....[A]ll the perfections of creatures, which are in created things dividedly and multiply, preexist in God unitedly" (*Summa Theologica* I.3.7, 13.5).

God *is* his attributes. He does not *have* them. He *is* love, justice, wisdom, etc. He is not an aggregate of qualities. God's attributes appear multiple because they are divided in us, not in him (e.g. mind & will, wisdom & love).

"For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known" (1 Cor 13:12).



- Augustine (AD 354–430) says, "In the marvelous simplicity of the divine nature, to be wise and to be are not different things; what constitutes wisdom, itself constitutes being" (*On the Trinity* XIII.22).



## E. Impassibility & Immutability: Does God have emotions or change in any way?

**Impassibility:** God does not have emotion because he is changless and incorporeal.

**Immutability:**

- **God is changeless & pure actuality with no unactualized potential or growth.** “For I the Lord do not change” (Mal 3:6).
- **Any apparent change in God is analogy, metaphor, or anthropomorphism.** “I regret that I have made Saul king... The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you... And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret... And the Lord regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel” (1 Sam 15:11, 28, 29, 35).
- **God’s immutability is reason to hope in his unchanging faithfulness.** “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” (James 1:17). “...by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us” (Heb 6:18).
- **God’s will does not change, but He wills change.** “God does not change in relation to the creature. Instead, the creature changes in relation to Him without any change in the God who is already immanently determinate...” “Immutability does not entail lifelessness; it entails that, as the ever-living and already-active one, God is and works in creation without passivity, indecision, or self-capitulation.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Steven J. Duby, “A Biblical and Theological Case for Divine Simplicity,” *The Lord is One*.



# Christian Thought

## Lesson III:

### Logic: Thinking Wisely

#### Resources:

- “The Metaphysics of Scripture” by David Haines & Andrew Fulford in *Philosophy and the Christian* (Davenant Press, 2018). Provided with special permission.
- *Think* by John Piper
- *Socratic Logic* by Peter Kreeft
- See [www.tljacobs.com/christian-thought](http://www.tljacobs.com/christian-thought) for more.

## What is Logic?

#### Definitions

1. Logic as the object studied, it is the intelligible structure of the universe.
2. Logic as the science that studies it, “Logic studies the forms or structures of thought.” (Kreeft)

**Critical Thinking:** Practical wisdom (i.e. prudence), esp. in its application of logic.

#### Why study Logic?

“...so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes” (Eph 4:14).

**Overall Goal:** To recognize good and bad justifications in order to gain knowledge of truth.

**Today’s Goal:** To provide a handful of critical thinking tools.

## Knowledge = Justified True Belief

**Justification:** The reasons why something is true. NOT the reasons why someone believes something.

**Truth:** When a proposition rightly corresponds to reality (**correspondence theory**).

**Objectivism:** Truth depends on mind-independent reality.

**Correspondence Theory:** A proposition is true if it corresponds to reality.

**Relativism:** Truth is personal or cultural opinion, or a mental framework created by people.

**Coherence Theory:** A proposition is true if and only if it does not contradict other claims in a closed system.

**Belief:** Assent to a proposition.

**Genetic Fallacy:** Saying that a claim is false because of where/who it came from. This is often guilt-by-association. If something is true, it doesn’t matter who said it, where it came from, or when it was said. The only thing that matters is **correspondence to reality**.

## How do I grow in using logic?

### Virtues

- **Humility:** Without humility, we'll be blinded by our own ignorance.
- **Philosophy (Love of truth):** "Philosophy" means the *love of wisdom*. We must love wisdom above saving face, pride, "winning," or reluctance to change our mind or life choices.
- **Fair-mindedness (Justice):** People are naturally allergic to new, strange ideas, but fair-mindedness will look past appearances and bad associations to investigate justification.
- **Practical Wisdom (Prudence):** The ability to judge causes and apply general principles to particular circumstances.

### Arguments (Prudence)

#### The Structure of an Argument (syllogism)

A syllogism is the most fundamental form of argument. Example:

Premise	1. All men are mortal.	General Principle
Premise	2. Paul is a man.	A particular case of the principle
Conclusion	3. Therefore Paul is mortal.	

#### Valid vs. Sound

**Valid:** The conclusion necessarily follows from the premises & argument. The argument has no logical fallacies and is "airtight," but the premises & conclusion may still be wrong.

**Sound:** Valid + all true premises & conclusion.

<u>Invalid &amp; Unsound</u>	<u>Valid &amp; Unsound</u>	<u>Sound</u>
1. Islands are surrounded by water.	1. All countries have a capitol.	1. All countries have a capitol.
2. Texas is an island.	2. Texas is a country.	2. USA is a country.
3. Therefore Texas is surrounded by water.	3. Therefore, Texas has a capitol.	3. Therefore, USA has a capitol.

#### Observations:

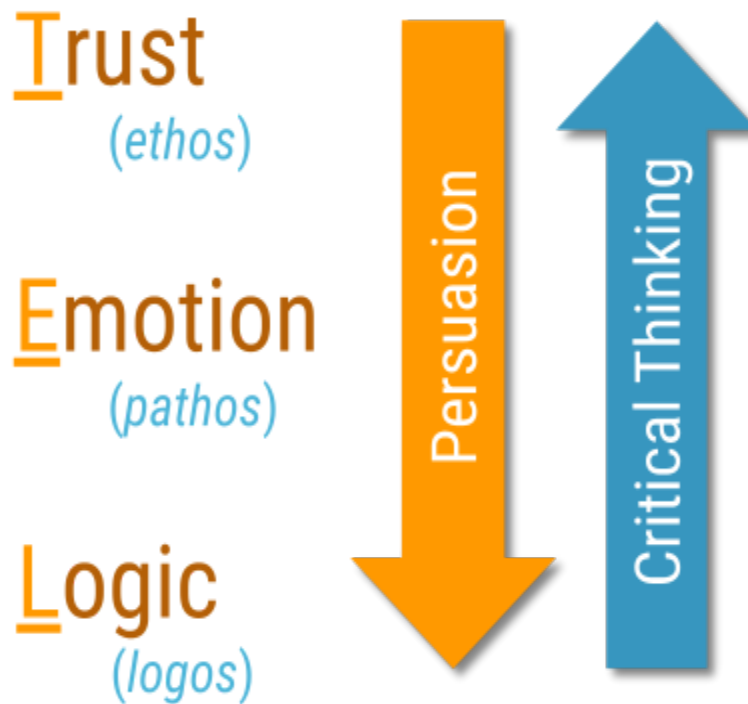
- An argument can be wrong (unsound) with great reasoning and no fallacies (valid).
- An argument can have a correct conclusion with an invalid argument, meaning it was coincidence or luck, and the argument does not provide **justification** even if it does provide **true belief**.
- Pointing out flaws in argument doesn't mean the conclusion is false, although if it is true, it must be for different reasons than the ones pointed out. This is why you can win an argument and still be wrong. Failure to recognize this is the **Straw Man Fallacy** (see below).

## Fallacies

1. **Logical Fallacy:** A violation of the laws of logic (intentional or not) that invalidates an *argument*, not a *statement* or *concept*. It is not the same as a falsehood. Fallacies are often very persuasive and very subtle. Fallacies may take many forms.  
**Why are Fallacies Used?**
  - Honest mistake.
  - Intentional manipulation. Fallacies are incredibly persuasive.
2. **Fallacy of Equivocation:** *Concepts* are not equivocal, only *terms*. “Equivocation is the simplest and most common of all the material fallacies. It means simply that the same term is used in two or more different senses in the course of an argument.” (Kreeft) This is why a huge portion of philosophy is just being clear about the meanings of words.  
 E.g. “Noisy children are a real headache. Two aspirin will make a headache go away.  
 Therefore, two aspirin will make noisy children go away.”
3. **Genetic Fallacy:** See above.
4. **Ad Hominem (At the man):** Attacking the person instead of their evidence and argument. E.g., name calling, guilt by association, racism, prejudice, stereotyping, us-them-mentality.
5. **Straw Man Fallacy:** Unfairly rejecting a conclusion based on a poor presentation of it. E.g., defeating a child’s argument for God’s existence is an inadequate reason to disbelieve in God.
6. **Chronological Snobbery:** Saying that something is more likely good or true because it is new (or old). E.g., the tendency to be skeptical of new/old things.
7. **Confirmation Bias:** Unfairly collecting only the evidence or reasons that appear to support your pre-chosen conclusion instead of fairly collecting all evidence & counter-arguments then following the evidence wherever it leads. E.g. Eisegesis.
8. **Correlation does not imply Causation:** Two things may be associated in other ways besides one being the cause of the other. It may be coincidental alignment, both may be effects of a different cause, or a host of other explanations. This fallacy is often used in statistics.
9. **Appeal to Emotion:** This is a form of distracting away from evidence to undermine logical thinking and cause people to make choices based on emotion (see Ethos, Pathos, Logos). E.g., advertisements, propaganda.
10. **False Dichotomy:** Posing only two possible options when there may be others.
11. **Oversimplification**
12. **Oversimplification**
13. etc.

## Ethos, Pathos, Logos

\*One of the most helpful tools for reasoning rightly and avoiding fallacies.



Examples:

Ethos			
Pathos			
Logos			

# Christian Thought

## PART 2: ETHICS

### Lesson IV

#### Human Nature & Natural Law

**Anthropology:** The study of man.

#### What is “Nature”?

1. **An Essence.** We determine *kinds of things* (aka. the *nature* or *essence* of something) by their proper function, which is the order God put into them that they should follow. E.g., scientific study of healthy animal behaviors.  
*Genesis 1:24 — And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.”*
2. **Natural vs. Artificial.** Since nature is a thing’s proper function, interference is artificial (a result of human art / action). E.g., “the natural world,” “Mother Nature.”

#### What is Human Nature?

- **Genus:** Animal Body
- **Specific Difference:** Reason (Animals don’t have this)
- **Species (“kind”):** “Rational Animal”

*\*Bonus: Porphyry’s Tree*

#### What is the “Image of God”?

- It Denotes *relationship* between picture & pictured (reference & referent). But *what attribute* is similar? What distinguishes animals from humans? Mind, & consequently moral responsibility.  
*Genesis 1:27 — So God created man in his own image, in the **image of God** he created him; male and female he created them.*  
*Genesis 2:7 — “Then the LORD God formed the man of **dust from the ground** and breathed into his nostrils the **breath of life.**”*
- **Etymology:** The English word “spirit” comes from the French “*esprit*” (def. mind), which comes from the Latin “*spiritus*” (def. breath, spirit). Hebrew רוּחַ (“*rwuah*”) (def. breath, wind, spirit) in Genesis refers to both the Holy Spirit & the breath of life. To be human is to have a **material body & mind/spirit**, the breath of the Holy Spirit.

### What is Reason (aka, Intellect, Mind)?

- Intellect is a power or ability, with two functions: **Cognition & Will**. This is the immaterial aspect of being human, i.e., *Rational* (spirit) Animal (body).
- Cognition's (aka reason's) proper function is defined by "the three acts of the mind."

Act Name	1. Understanding	2. Judgment	3. Reason
Mental Product	Concepts of Universals (terms)	Propositions (combining terms)	Arguments (combining propositions)
What is apprehended	Essences (what things are)	Truth (correspondence to reality)	Causes
Expression	Words, phrases	Declarative sentences	Paragraphs

\*Aristotle said, "True wisdom is understanding causes." Even he knew the first cause is God.

### What is Second Nature?

- **Background:** Powers in themselves may be used well or ill.
- **Definition:** A disposition added to a power that habituates the power to act in certain ways.
- **Virtue:** A habit that predisposes a power to act perfectly.
  - **Intellectual Virtue:** A habit that perfects **Cognition**. E.g., Smarts, critical thinking, logical reasoning, etc.
  - **Moral Virtue:** A habit that makes its possessor good (perfects the **Will**), e.g. wisdom, the Fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace...
- **Vice:** A habit contrary to the proper function of a power.
- **Natural Law:** The proper functioning of human activity, based on human nature as God created it to imitate him. Therefore, it is the foundation of ethics. As "rational animal," we are to live wisely, not foolishly.

### What is Sin Nature?

#### What it IS NOT

It does not corrupt human nature — the kind, essence, or definition of "human" — or else we would be "nonhuman." Sin doesn't change our God-created order to another order. Rather, it causes *disorder*. Where order is the perfection we seek, disorder is the sin we fight.

#### What it IS

- **Natural Vice or Depravity:** A privation, corruption, or decay of the perfect order God created.
- **Broken Relationship:** Because we are born imperfect, we are born a tarnished image of God, separated from God, and with a broken relationship.
- Definitions:
  - **Good:** (1) Proper order according to God's nature & design. (2) The proper end something should seek (same as #1).
  - **Evil:** A privation of good.
  - **Sin:** (1) An action that does not achieve the proper end ("misses the mark") and is therefore (2) an imperfect action. E.g., foolishness, any act not following reason/wisdom.

### Essentialism vs. Existentialism

- **Essentialism:** The claim that there are essences, or natures, that describe what things are, their natural order, and how they *should* function. In other words, your identity is primarily in how God made you, not in what you do.
- **Existentialism:**
  1. *broadly:* A form of philosophical inquiry exploring the meaning of life, experience, feeling, “authenticity,” death, willpower, etc.
    - E.g., Søren Kierkegaard is sometimes called the “Father of Existentialism.” He was a Christian calling intellectuals to action, however, he also heightened the popularity that faith and belief are based on the will alone separate from reason. He popularized the phrase “leap of faith.”
  2. *narrowly:* The claim that “**existence precedes essence**,” meaning humans have no preset obligations or purpose in life. In the “meaninglessness of life” people have the “freedom” to choose whatever they want.
    - E.g., Your identity is whatever you choose, not in how you were made. This is the ultimate self-determination.

### Examples of Existentialism’s influence on the church:

- Salvation is something chosen, not received.
- People define themselves primarily by hobbies, network, associations, race, etc.
- Identity and sense of self-worth come from personal choices, success, career, social groups.
- Christian freedom of conscience becomes license to disagree with sound teaching.
- Relativism and pluralism. Christians grow comfortable, complacent, and okay with friends, family, and coworkers believing something different.
- Egalitarianism & LGBTQ becomes more acceptable by even conservative-minded laymen, pastors, and teachers.

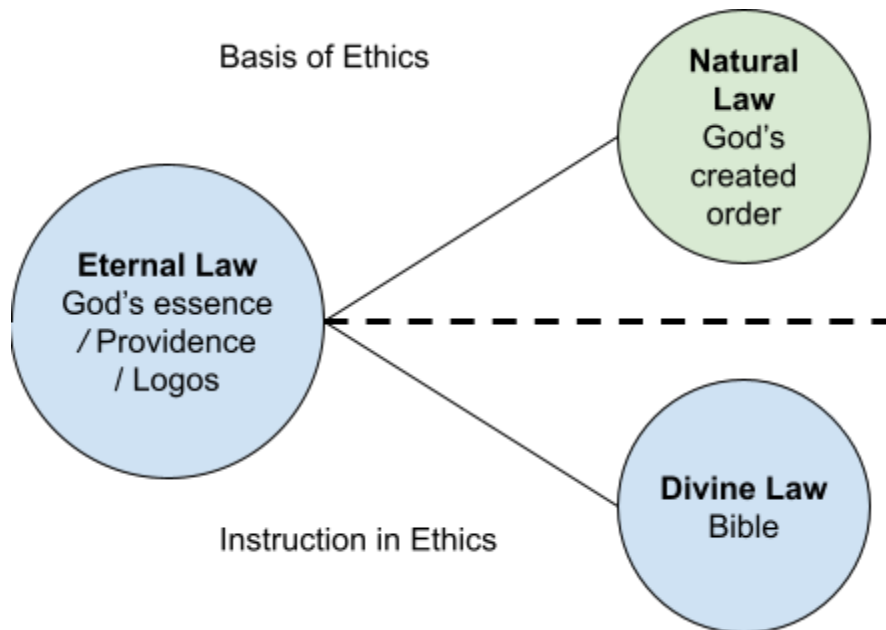


# Christian Thought

## Lesson V:

### Virtue: Practicing Wisdom

#### Recap



- Divine law verifies and clarifies the natural law. General Revelation and Special Revelation work together.
- **Euthyphro Problem:** Are things good because God commands it (**Divine Command Theory**)? Or does he will it because it's good? DCT makes God's commands arbitrary instead of wise and makes God unknowable. The latter option limits his sovereignty.
  - **Christian Answer:** Ethics is based in God's character.
  - **Natural Law:** God creates things to function in a certain way, and this order is derived from his own character. Ethics is based in God's character and will include imitating God.

## Map of Ethics



1. **Metaethics:** Defines good and evil and asks what the basis of ethics is. E.g., Is goodness relativistic or objective? Is evil a force or privation? Is ethics based on DCT, natural law, or something else?
2. **Normative Ethics:** Metaethics answers generate systems that organize and prescribe ethical principles. The three main ethical systems are:
  - a. **Virtue Ethics:** An action is good if it expresses a virtuous character trait (i.e. godly character trait, fruit of the Spirit).
  - b. **Deontology (Duty):** An action is good if it follows a duty or law, regardless of virtue or consequences (Divine Command Theory falls under this).
  - c. **Consequentialism (i.e. Utilitarianism):** An action is good if it fulfills desirable consequences. Utilitarianism says the desired consequence is the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. Virtue and duty are useful only as tools, sometimes.
    - \* Note: The concepts of virtue, duty, and consequences are present in all three theories, but the difference is in their specific role within those theories.
3. **Applied Ethics:** Application of general principles to specific circumstances. I.e., daily life choices, marriage, parenting, politics, business ethics, bioethics, etc.
4. **Descriptive Ethics:** Describing the beliefs of a certain individual, group, or theory.

*“This is what the philosophers say: that man’s mind as it becomes accustomed to virtues or vices, contracts the habit of them. Now habits are acquired qualities by which with regard to our moral character we conduct ourselves well or badly. So do I understand that passage in Aristotle’s Ethics [2.1], that moral virtue is acquired by practice.” — John Calvin, Commentary on Seneca’s De Clementia*

*“Virtue comes about as a result of habit... From this it is also plain that none of the moral excellences arises in us by nature... by nature we first acquire the potentiality and later exhibit the actuality...; but virtues we get by first exercising them... we learn by doing” — Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics 2.1*

*“Virtue implies a perfection of power ... Therefore human virtue which is an operative habit, is a good habit, productive of good works.” — Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica I-II.55.3*

*“Virtue is a good quality of the mind, by which we live righteously, of which no one can make bad use, which God works in us, without us.” — Augustine, De Libero Arbitrio 2.19*

*Virtue is “the beauty of those qualities and acts of the mind that are of a moral nature, i.e. such as are attended with desert or worthiness of praise or blame.” — Jonathan Edwards, The Nature of True Virtue.*

## Virtue & Duty

**Duty:** A moral or legal obligation.

**Virtue:** A habit that makes its possessor good (as opposed to making its possessor smart, athletic, evil, etc.). A habit is a disposition to act in a certain way in relevantly similar circumstances; a Godly character trait; a fruit of the Spirit.

**Which one serves the other, duty or virtue?**

**What is the proper motive of our actions?**

### Duty as a Teacher

- Duty or rules are essential for teaching morality but aren't the goal.

*“So then, the law was our guardian [teacher / tutor] until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith” (Gal. 3:24–25)*

- OT law taught us what's good and our need for grace to do what's good.
  - Example: rules for children.
- The goal of the rule is to teach understanding of a principle.
- What is the principle? Godly character, namely the life of wisdom, not a list of rules.

*“You have heard that it was said... ‘You shall not murder’...*

*But I said to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment...*

*You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’*

*But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already...*

*It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’*

*But I say to you that everyone who divorces... commits adultery*

*Again you have heard that it was said... ‘You shall not swear falsely...’*

*But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all... Let what you say be simply ‘yes’ or ‘no.’*

*You have heard that it was said, ‘an eye for an eye...’*

*But I say to you... if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other...*

*You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’*

*But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.*

*(Matt. 5:21–48)*

### Making Law

Making law is universalizing a particular application *as if* it were a universal obligation. If we don't understand the principle behind morality, we tend to make extra-biblical rules, like Pharisees.

- Examples: Pharisees; Our tendency towards legalism / moralism; Temptation to universalize our actions as rules for everyone (Note: This is Immanuel Kant's Deontology).
- Examples: “Anyone who \_\_\_ isn't a Christian.” “I don't see how a Christian could \_\_\_.” “A Christian should always [read the Bible daily; pray over meals; avoid a certain TV show; not read certain books; not go to public school; etc.]”

\*We'll cover this again later in this lesson

## The Principle & Goal: Virtue

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit... those who mourn... the meek... those who hunger and thirst for righteousness... the merciful... the pure in heart... the peacemakers...” (Matt. 5:3–10)*

*“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others” (Matt. 23:23).*

*“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law...” (Gal. 5:22–23).*

*“For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love” (2 Peter 1:5–7).*

\*Virtue lists are found as antithesis (e.g., Gal 5:19–23; Jas 3:13–18), contrast (e.g., Titus 3:1–7), instruction (e.g., 2 Pet 1:5–7) or polemics (e.g., 1 Tim 1:9–10; 6:3–5; 2 Tim 3:2–5).

Resources (available at [tljacobs.com](http://tljacobs.com))

- “Virtue and Vice Lists,” by Tim Jacobs, *Lexham Bible Dictionary*
- “Golden Rule,” by Tim Jacobs, *Lexham Bible Dictionary*
- “Virtue,” by Tim Jacobs, *Jonathan Edwards Encyclopedia*

## The Golden Mean

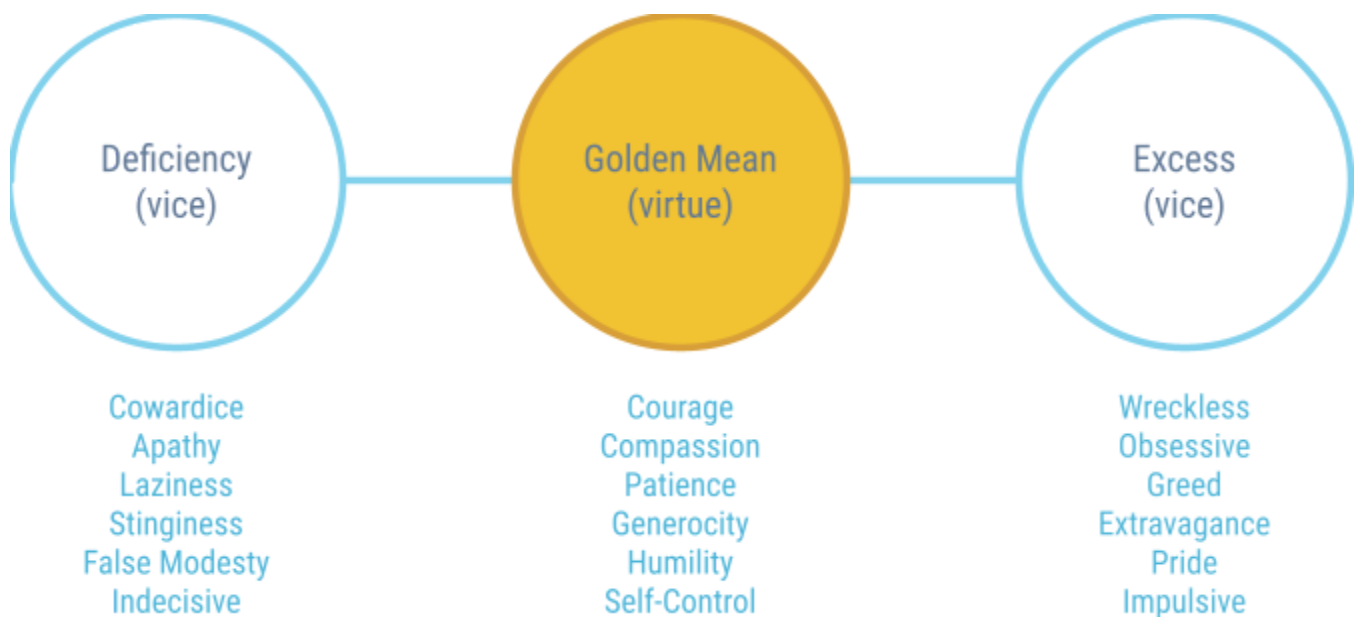
### Overcorrecting vs. Finding the Principle

When we notice something bad, we react against it, but without the principle, we don't truly know why it was bad and what the replacement good is. The result is usually **making law** or **overcorrecting**. To fight this tendency, try to identify the virtue, or Christlike character trait, that is in play. A **tool** to do this is the Golden Mean.

*“Do not turn to the right nor to the left; Turn your foot from evil” (Prov. 4:27)*

*“Be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn to the right or to the left” (Josh. 1:7; c.f. Deut. 5:32; c.f. 17:11, 20; 28:14)*

- Since virtue is a **habit** according to **wisdom**, that leads and trains emotion and aims to **glorify God by imitating Christ**, then all virtues will have these qualities. Similar character traits that don't will not be virtue. Analogy: Sin is missing the mark, not hitting the center.
- You cannot be too virtuous or have too much of a virtue.
- Some actions are by definition good or evil and not subject to the golden mean, e.g. murder, adultery.
- This is not a rule, and no rule can replace principle. It takes wisdom to understand and apply universal principles to particular circumstances.



#### Resource

- “Christian Metaphysics and Aristotelianism,” in *Four Views on Christian Metaphysics*, edited by Tim Mosteller (Prof. of Philosophy at California Baptist University).

## Principle vs. Practice (Recap)

- Principle > Practice.  
Principle = understanding the purpose, and the purpose is virtue (heart & mind united in good habit & character traits).
- Virtue > duty. Duty makes a good teacher but only a provisional motive, but if it is made the ultimate goal (which it was never meant to be), then it will be legalism, moralism, Pharisaism, etc.
- Example: “Look both ways before you cross the street” is a rule for my kids as training until they understand the purpose. If they say, “I’ll do it because of duty,” that’s provisionally good, but misses the point. It is partial obedience, wisdom, and the right heart, but it is not full wisdom, nor the best heart motive, nor perfect obedience.
- Wisdom is understanding causes and purposes, so we’ll turn to the ultimate purpose of life.

## What is the Chief End of Man?

- Q: What is the chief end of man? (1647 Westminster Shorter Catechism)
  - A: Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever. (Ps. 16:5-11, 86:9).
- "All men by nature desire to know." "There is some end of the things we do... clearly this must be the good and the chief good. Will not the knowledge of it, then, have a great influence on life?" (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1.1; *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.1)
- Augustine says, "All men agree in desiring the last end, which is happiness" (*On the Trinity* 8.3).
- Thomas Aquinas says, "Final and perfect happiness can consist in nothing else than the vision of the Divine Essence. To make this clear, two points must be observed. First, that man is not perfectly happy, so long as something remains for him to desire and seek. Secondly, that the perfection of any power is determined by the nature of its object. Now the object of the intellect is "what a thing is," i.e. the essence of a thing... Wherefore the intellect attains perfection, in so far as it knows the essence of a thing." (*Summa Theologica* I-II.3.8).
- "Happiness is said to be the supreme good, inasmuch as it is the perfect possession or enjoyment of the Supreme Good." (ST I-II.5.2 ad 2).

**Definition of Happiness:** Blessedness (*makarios*, Matt. 5); flourishing life. This is accomplished by leading a virtuous, Christ-imitating life.

**Summary:** God made man rational, so our chief end / good / happiness is found in knowing him (*beatific vision*). In Phil. 3:8 Paul says, "Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord."

*"As [Aristotle] says [in Physics 2.2], the end is twofold — the end 'for which' and the end 'by which' If, therefore, we speak of man's last end as of the thing which is the end... God is the last end of man.... If, however, we speak of man's last end as of the acquisition of the end...[men] attain to their last end by knowing and loving God.... happiness [virtue] means the acquisition of the last end." (ST I-II.1.8)*

### Explanation:

1. Man's chief end is God, because we do everything for God (i.e. to glorify God).

What do we do for God? How do we do things for God?

2. Man's chief end is virtue because the goal in this life is to become godly, Christ-like, virtuous people exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit.

**Summary:** We do everything (1) for God (2) by being virtuous.

*"Imperfect happiness that can be had in this life, can be acquired by man by his natural powers, in the same way as virtue... But man's perfect Happiness... consists in the vision of the Divine Essence. Now the vision of God's Essence surpasses the nature of man... [and it] falls short of the vision of the Divine Essence [beatific vision].... Consequently neither man, nor any creature, can attain final Happiness by his natural powers.... Therefore it is impossible that it be bestowed through the action of any creature: but by God alone is man made happy, if we speak of perfect Happiness.." (ST I-II.5.5–6).*

**Explanation:** There is (1) an imperfect happiness attainable by imperfect virtue by natural man and (2) perfect happiness attainable only by God's grace.



## Classification of the Virtues

### I. Intellectual Virtues

*Explanation:* Seeks truth; aka. makes you “smart”)

- A. **Theoretical** (seeks truth): Deduction, discernment, critical thinking, etc.
- B. **Practical** (uses truth & seeks action): art/craft & prudence (practical wisdom).

### II. Cardinal Virtues / Moral Virtues

*Explanation:* These are four *aspects* of every virtuous action. “Cardinal” = most important. We must *know* truth (intellectual virtue) ultimately to *apply* truth for moral actions.

- 1. **Prudence:** Practical wisdom. The ability to apply universal, general principles to particular circumstances. Double-duty as intellectual and moral virtue.
  - **Most important** insofar as it organizes and directs all other virtues to wise action.
- 2. **Justice:** Fairness.
- 3. **Temperance:** Moderation, self-control.
- 4. **Fortitude:** Courage, diligence, hard work, overcoming obstacles.

### III. Theological Virtues

*Explanation:* Unite us to God, given by grace, practiced with the Holy Spirit's help. Their object is God, nonsense outside of Christianity. “These virtues are called Divine, not as though God were virtuous by reason of them, but because of them God makes us virtuous, and directs us to Himself” (ST I-II.62.1 ad 2). “So now **faith, hope, and love** abide, these three; but the **greatest of these is love**” (1 Cor. 13:13).

#### 1. Faith

- (1) (Salvation) Supernaturally aided assent to belief in God.
- (2) (Sanctification) The virtue whereby we practice trust in God.
- *Temporary:* Faith will become sight. “We walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known” (1 Cor. 13:12).

#### 2. Hope: Trusting God will provide what is good and expecting to possess what is promised. (Not the same a longing, “I hope I’ll get it for Christmas!”)

- *Temporary:* Hope becomes possession. “For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience” (Ro. 8:25).

#### 3. Love / Charity: Seeking what is ultimately good for the agent; Loving God and loving others for the love of God.

- *Eternal:* “Love never ends” (1 Cor 13:8). “...the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:13).
- **Most Important:** Whereas prudence directs all action, charity actually seeks possession of the end, which is union with God.
- **Love of Neighbor:**
  - *Charity ≠ Friendship / Justice:* Unbeliever can’t love unconditionally, or for God’s sake.
  - *Charity is loving God and loving others for the love of God.*

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love....We love because he first loved us” (1 Jn. 4:7–8, 19).
  - **Common Good:** Love of neighbor is built on self-love (“love your neighbor as yourself” Lev. 19:18) because what’s good for me is the common good, the shared possession of God (More discussion on this next week).

## Prudence & The Practical Syllogism

**Prudence (practical wisdom):** The ability to apply general universal moral principles to a specific circumstance.

### Syllogism of Practical Reason

	<i>Explanation</i>	<i>Example #1</i>	<i>Example #2</i>
<i>Major Premise</i>	General universal principle	Courtesy is good.	Don't kill innocent life.
<i>Minor Premise</i>	ID of specific case or circumstance	Cutting someone off in traffic isn't courteous.	Abortion is killing an innocent life.
<i>Conclusion</i>	Action to be (not) done	Don't cut people off.	Abortion is wrong.

### Seven Circumstantial Variables

- |          |           |                                 |
|----------|-----------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Who?  | 4. Where? | 7. By what instruments / tools? |
| 2. What? | 5. Why?   |                                 |
| 3. When? | 6. How?   |                                 |

What & why are the most important, defining the essence and motive (goal, intention) of the action. The rest may or may not be applicable, depending on circumstance.

### Christian Freedom vs. Legalism

Christian freedom recognizes that it takes wisdom to apply principles to circumstances, and different people often have different circumstances. We are bound to our **consciences**, and there must be freedom to pursue wisdom as we see it. However, **legalism** sets in if we universalize a narrow application.

## Conscience

### What is Conscience?

- NOT Consciousness (Awareness).
- **Definition:** A judgment of practical reason to accuse or excuse past or future action.

### Is conscience reason or emotion?

A conscience is not an emotion but an act of reason, so freedom of conscience is not “feeling good about yourself.”

### Why does it “feel right/wrong”?

Conscience is sometimes confused with emotional habit. Since reason should lead and train emotion, sometimes something can “feel right” when it is wrong or “feel wrong” when it is good.

### Is conscience a habit?

Conscience is subject to habit, as any intellectual habit. Therefore, it is subject to influence of culture, meditation on God’s law, etc.

### Can conscience err or be wrong?

Conscience is not the Holy Spirit, though God may use it. It is a judgment of *our* minds, and therefore subject to human error, cultural influence, cultivation of biblical wisdom and habits, etc.

### Do we always have to follow conscience?

Yes. By definition, not following conscience is purposefully intending evil. If you change your mind and do not follow your old judgment but make a new judgment, you are changing your conscience, even though the right thing may still “feel wrong” because of lagging emotions.”

*Example:* Huckleberry Finn debated within himself whether to free the slave Jim. He identified society’s laws with his conscience and exclaimed in a decisive moment that he would just go against his conscience. In reality, he was changing his conscience, making a new judgment of practical reason.

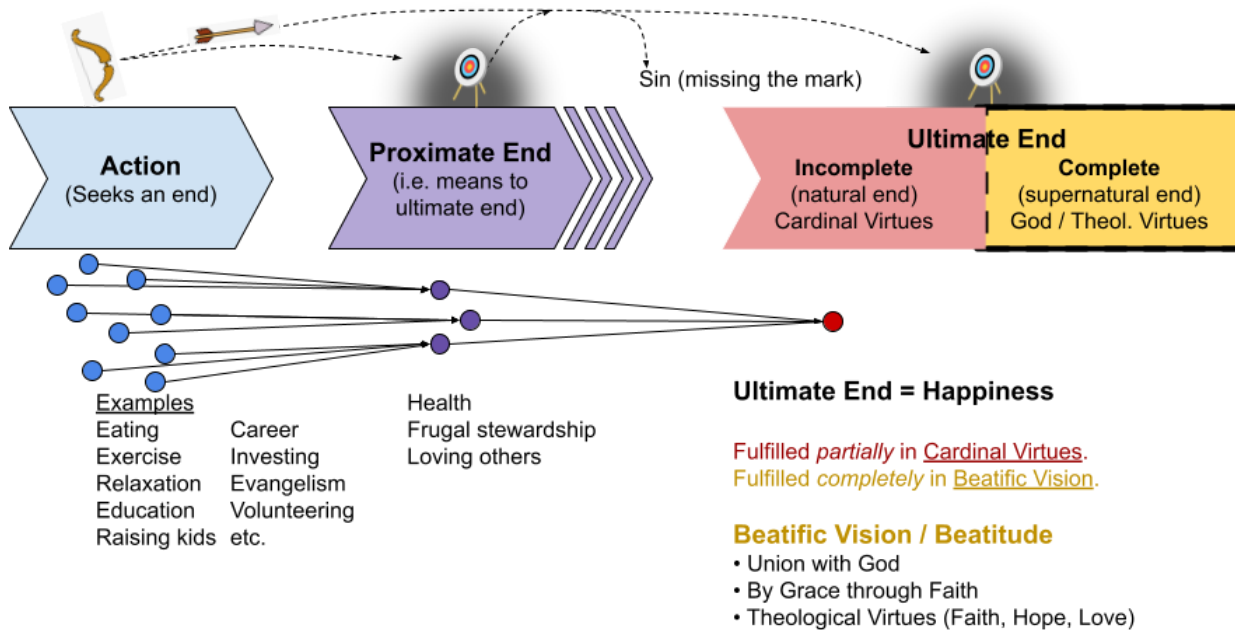
### Resources

- Tim Jacobs, “The Erring Conscience and Freedom of Religion: Aquinas on Freedom of Conscience in Pluralistic Society,” *Lex Naturalis: A Journal of Natural Law* 5 (Fall 2020).
- *Mere Christianity*, by C. S. Lewis

# Christian Thought

## Lesson VI: The Common Good in Church & Society

### Recap: Ultimate End



### Happiness

#### What constitutes happiness?

PLEASURE

Blessedness (*makarios*) / flourishing life

#### What constitutes a flourishing life?

Virtue perfects human powers (abilities) by directing them to their ultimate end, which is God.

#### What is the ultimate end?

That *for the sake of which* all is done:

That *by which* all is done:

God

Virtue (aka. godliness, fruit of the Spirit)

esp. Theological Virtues (Faith, Hope, Love)

## Egoism vs. Altruism

**If the goal of all my actions is self-perfection, is the goal self-centered?**

**Are my actions self-serving or others-serving?**

**Is it *good* for me or *bad* for me to do good things for others?**

**Are all my actions only serving *either* “myself & not others” or “others & not myself”?**

- Self-*ish*: Serving my good at another’s expense. (Egoism)
- Self-*less*: ~~Serving another’s good at my expense. (Altruism)~~  
Serving my good *through* another’s good. (Common Good)

## The Shared Common Good

**The Shared Common Good:** A “Good” that is possessed only by a united body composed of individuals.

Examples:

- Marriage
- Family
- A Nation
- God (≈ the “victory”) & The Church (team)



NOT

- Social Contract: Individuals pursuing individualistic ends and *using* each other as the means.
- “Sharing” by dividing (e.g. popcorn).
- Mere social justice, though on a natural level, the common good is justice in the state.
- “Common predication,” i.e. mere resemblance or coincidental common quality. Instead, it is a **common cause**.

**Updated Ultimate Goal:** The ultimate goal of human action is to serve the common good, that good which fulfills us all simultaneously. The ultimate common good is union with **God** (i.e. the “victory” that is possessed) possessed by the Church (i.e. the team, the united body, the subject who possesses).

*...the end is twofold — the end ‘for which’ and the end ‘by which’ If, therefore, we speak of man’s last end as of the thing which is the end... God is the last end of man.... If, however, we speak of man’s last end as of the acquisition of the end...[men] attain to their last end by knowing and loving God.... happiness [virtue] means the acquisition of the last end.” (Thomas Aquinas, ST I-II.1.8)*

## Quotes

*Speaking of the civil common good, John Calvin states, “When there is an accepted custom, and it is a good and decent one, we must accept it. And whoever tries to change it is surely the enemy of the common good.” (John Calvin, Men, Women, and Order in the Church: Three Sermons).*

*“We know that men were created to busy themselves with labor and that no sacrifice is more pleasing to God than when each one attends to his calling and studies well to live for the common good” (Calvin’s Commentaries, Luke 10:38)*

*“In this way, no one shall perform any task for his own benefit but all your work shall be done for the common good... For charity, as it is written, is not self seeking (1 Cor. 13:5) meaning that it places the common good before its own, not its own before the common good. So whenever you show greater concern for the common good than for your own, you may know that you are growing in charity. Thus, let the abiding virtue of charity prevail in all things that minister to the fleeting necessities of life” (Augustine, The Rule of St. Augustine 31, c. 400 AD).*

*“There is no virtue whose act is not ordainable to the common good... either mediately or immediately”*  
(Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I-II.96.3 ad 3).



## 1 Corinthians 12:12–31

4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the **common good**.... [Continue to end of chapter]

**Illustration**

When the Angels baseball team wins, it is the *team* that possesses the victory. The *individuals* do not possess it *as individuals* but only insofar as they are members of the *team that possesses it*. Likewise, Christians possess salvation insofar as they are members of the *church* which is united to Christ as its body and as his bride. This is true even if there is only one member in the team or church.

**Problems arise when...**

1. We think the church is a human institution rather than the people themselves.
2. We equate the invisible (i.e., universal) church with the visible (i.e., local) church, like Catholicism or Greek Orthodoxy once did.
3. We sin, i.e. serve individual goods (egoism) at the expense of the common good.
4. Cut ourselves off from the common good.
5. Treat the common good as a *mere means* to individual goods (consumerist approach to churchgoing).

**More passages:**

- Ephesians 2:12–22, esp. 14, 19, 21.
- Ephesians 4:11–16, esp. 16.
- 1 Cor. 11:17–32 (This is why it's *Communion* & why "unworthy manner" ≈ divisions)
- Matthew 6:9 (First word of Lord's Prayer)
- Romans 16:17–18 (egoism vs. common good)
- Philippians 2:1–4
- Exodus 19:6;
- 1 Corinthians 1:10–17;
- 1 Corinthians 3 (esp. v. 16).
- Mark 3:22–27 (house divided against itself)