



Biblical Ethics

Introductory Matters, pt.1

January 7, 2024
Adult Sunday School
Lewis Lake Covenant Church

Case study

Mary, a single teenage mother from an abusive home, is six months pregnant. Dr. Smith, a Christian, just read the results of a test indicating Mary's baby has Down Syndrome. From previous conversations, she knows once Mary discovers this, she will get an abortion. By keeping the information from Mary, Dr. Smith knows the child will be born. What should Dr. Smith do, and why? If she withholds the information, Mary will sue her for medical malpractice and probably win. Given the legal realities in her state, she may lose her license. Does that matter?

Questions to consider:

What are the competing ethical claims on Dr. Smith?

What are the contradictory ethical claims between Dr. Smith and Mary?

If Dr. Smith hides the information from Mary, can she say with certainty that her ethical claims trump Mary's? State law?

Can your solution be reached both with and without appeal to the Bible? Does that matter?

Presuppositions:

- We live in a moral universe. Morality exists.
- Everyone understands we live in a moral universe.
- Morality is as complex as the universe in which we live.
- Morality is primarily objective and universal, but can be subjective and personal.

Current challenges:

- We live in a scientific age.
 - o Science: publicly agreed upon reality
 - o Metaphysics (beyond the physical): untestable, personally affirmed reality, or ‘my truth.’
 - o Science: what is
 - o Ethics: what ought to be

- Fact/value or is/ought. How do you get ethics from a laboratory?
- We *also* live in a post-scientific, skeptical age. Nothing can be known for sure. Why should we trust ‘the experts’?
 - Who gets to say “what ought to be”?
 - How can moral truth be verified?
- We live in a post-Christian age. The Bible’s morality is viewed as outdated, unenlightened, insufficient, ill-conceived, oppressive, manmade, and surpassed. Further, submission to biblical ethics is voluntary, not mandatory.

The following material is taken primarily from David Jones, *An Introduction to Biblical Ethics*

I. Distinctives of Biblical Ethics

A. It is built on an objective, theistic worldview

“Biblical ethics seek to identify and to follow a universal, divine *ought*, whereas secular ethics tend to focus on a local, human *should*.”

B. It is not a means of earning favor with God but rather is the natural result of righteousness already imputed by God.

“As believers gradually adopt biblical ethics... they do not accumulate righteousness or merit; rather, they practically become like that which they are already considered to be.”

C. It seeks to recognize and to participate in God’s moral order already present within the created order and in special revelation.

“Biblical ethics is revelatory and participatory in nature, not constructive and formative... God’s moral order is comprehensive and sufficient for all ethical encounters – past, present, and future.”

D. It affirms immorality stems from human depravity, not primarily from man’s ignorance of ethics or from socioeconomic conditions.

“Biblical ethics proposes the solution for immorality, both personal and societal (or structural), is a change of man’s heart, not merely a modification of man’s environment.”

- E. In the process of assigning moral praise or blame, biblical ethics incorporates conduct (i.e., the what), character (i.e., the who), and goals (i.e., the why) of individuals involved in moral events.

“Non-Christian systems of ethics tend to reduce morality to the level of conduct.”

II. Defining Biblical Ethics:

“Biblical ethics is the study and application of the morals prescribed in God’s Word that pertain to the kind of conduct, character, and goals required of one who professes to be in a redemptive relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Notes & Doodles

*You shall be
holy, for I the
LORD your God
am holy.*

Leviticus 19:2

