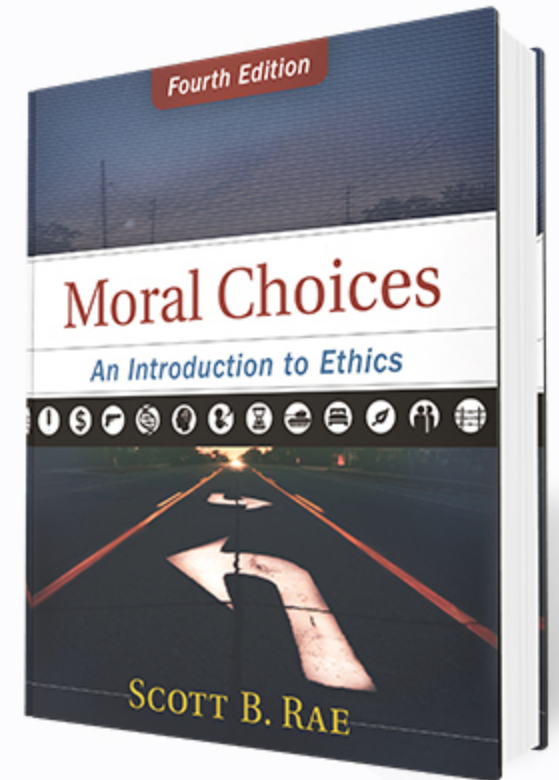


Chapter 3: Christian Ethics



Introduction

- Introduction
 - Christian ethics are a combination of both virtues and commands.
 - Virtues take the primary role between the two, finding their origin in the nature of God.
 - The virtues of God's character and the commands which derive from it are the primary normative system of ethics found in the Bible.
 - Increasingly, the greatest apologetic need for today is integrity in Christian Ethics.
 - Most people in the West are rejecting Christianity and the Bible as *immoral*.

- The Bible is not an ethics text. (?)
 - It does include a variety of different kinds of ethical reasoning, such as:
 - utilitarianism
 - ethical egoism
 - natural law
 - There is no appeal to relativism.
 - The various kinds of ethical reasoning act as a supplement to the primary means of ethical reasoning which is virtues and principles.

Old Testament Ethics

- Aspects of the Law
 - Three aspects of the Mosaic Law:
 - The moral
 - The ceremonial
 - The civil
 - The rest of the writings derive their authority from the law.
 - Prophets
 - Wisdom Literature

- Christ and the Law

- Christ largely supersedes the ceremonial and civil aspects of the law.
- It is still very valuable for Christians to study.
- Good hermeneutics are imperative in order to discern what Old Testament principles are normative for today.

- A range of verses that speak to the complicated relationship between the law and the gospel in the New Testament

- **Matt. 5:17**; Rom. 10:4; Gal. 2:19; 3:24; Rom. 13:8; Gal. 6:2; Jam. 2:8; Gal. 5:4-5; John 15:10
- Other approaches: Kaiser's Principilizing method, All law still applies but not apart from as it is fulfilled in Christ, OT law is no longer binding (dispensational)

- The Law

- Obedience to the Law is really to be understood as loyalty to God himself.
- God is owed loyalty for who he is and what he has done for the Israelites.
- The structure of the law is that of the suzerainty treaty.
 - The responsibilities between the king and his subjects
 - This is a common ANE custom.

- The Law

- Holiness plays a major role in the Law (Lev. 19:2).
- The people of God were to be set apart in order to reflect the character of God.
- They were to demonstrate God's holiness in their social relationships.
 - The poor
 - Widows
 - Orphans
 - Strangers

New Testament Ethics

- Morality for the Church
 - The Kingdom of God is what the church is called to be a microcosm of until Christ returns.
 - The kingdom of God is concerned with justice and social wellbeing.
 - It is a blend of principles and virtues.
 - The greatest is love for God and others.
 - Jesus and the apostles appealed to principles in their teaching.
 - Jesus did not apply principles at the expense of virtues.
 - Beatitudes (Mt. 5:3-12) and Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25-37)

- Morality for the Church

- It was inconceivable to the early Christians that someone could identify as a believer but not put into practice the ethical demands of the Kingdom.
- The Kingdom has a special concern for the poor.
- Jesus noted that his coming was good news for the poor.
- The epistles also highlight the cause of the poor.
- OT focus of vulnerable people: widows, poor, orphans, and strangers
- NT focus of vulnerable people: women, children, slaves, and poor

- Morality for the Church

- New Testament ethics is Spirit empowered and not the result of ascetic self discipline.
- The Spirit of God provides the resources for spiritual and moral maturity.
- Living by the power of the Spirit produces the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23).
- The Holy Spirit's work in the life of the believer is essential to moral and spiritual transformation.

Ethical Theories

- Divine Command Theory
 - A system of ethics which emphasizes God's commands is called a *divine command theory* of ethics.
 - God's nature revealed by his commands found in Scripture is the ultimate foundation for morality.
 - The Euthyphro problem.
 - God's commands are not the foundation for ethics, but rather his nature is.

- Natural Law

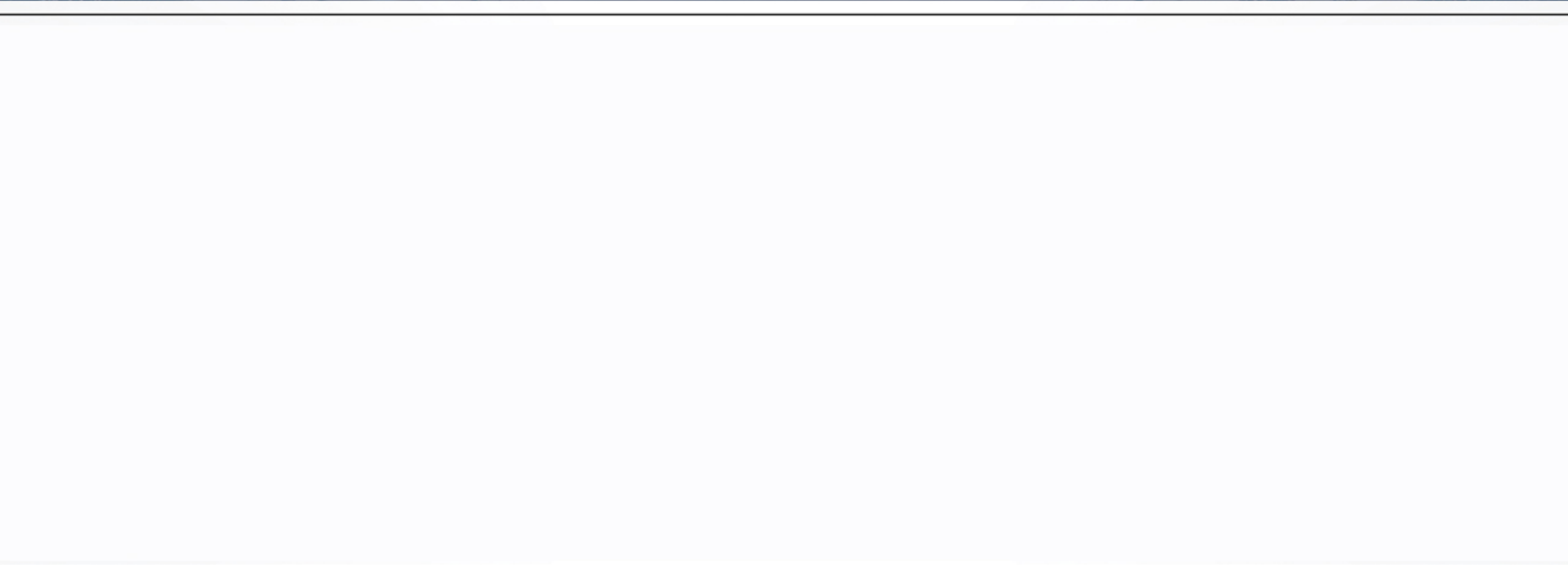
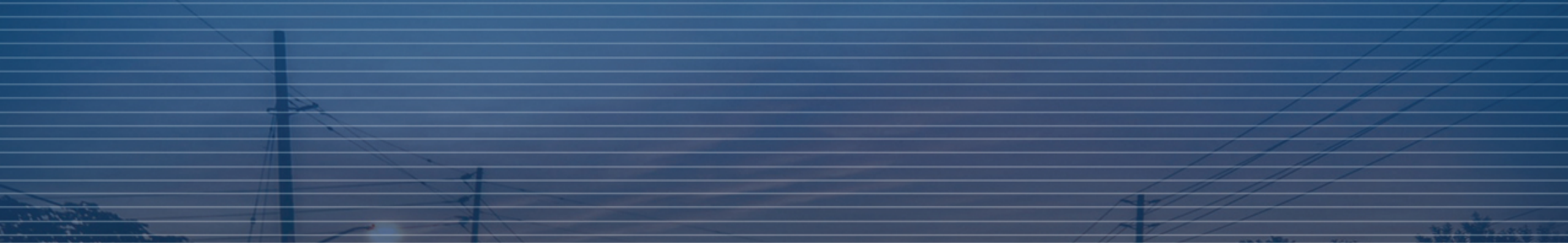
- Natural law is a controversial theory of ethics.
- Theologically, natural law is controversial for some believers, primarily those of the Reformed tradition.
- There are a number of important questions that need to be asked of the natural law theory.
 - First, to what degree can morals be known apart from special revelation?
 - Second, to what degree can a person be good without the special revelation of God?
 - Third, to what degree is Christian ethics distinctive from nonreligious ethical systems?

- Natural Law

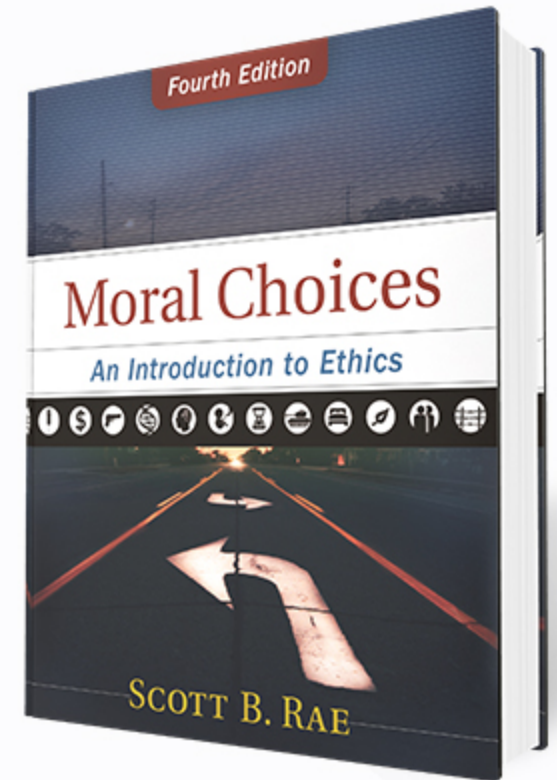
- Defining the nature of natural law is difficult.
- Typically, it includes the belief that objective moral virtues exist and can be known apart from Scripture.
- The central passage in the Bible touching on natural law is Romans 2:1-16.
- The Old Testament supports the concept of natural moral law in the wisdom literature and the prophets.

- Natural Law

- Criticism of natural law tends to focus not on its existence but on how it can be reliably known.
 - Reformers doubt the value of natural law based on the depravity of humans.
 - They argue that what some maintain is natural is in fact contrary to what Scripture itself teaches.
- The relationship between natural law and civil rights
 - Legal positivists hold there is no essential relationship between the law and morality.
 - Moral realism, on the other hand, maintains that for any law to be valid it must relate to moral truths.



Chapter 4: Making Ethical Decisions



Introduction

- The Bible and Ethical Decision Making
 - Unfortunately for Christians, the Bible does not always address an ethical issue as clearly as we might like.
 - When that is the case, Christians must look to biblical principles and virtues to assist them in making a good choice.
 - It is not always clear what virtues and principles should be applied to the issue or what virtues and principles should be given the greatest weight.

Introduction

- This is Scott Rae's method outlined in ch. 4 of Moral Choices, 4th Ed.
 - It is designed to be able to be used by anyone, not explicitly Christian (p.10).
 - It favors virtues and values with a subordinate accommodation to consequences.
 - Require an ethical dilemma where two or more values potentially in conflict.
- This means he uses a “graded absolutism,” some principles are above others
 - Absolutism - there are no real dilemmas
 - Prima facie absolutism - there are exceptions in a fallen world
 - Nonconflicting absolutism - distinguish generalizations and absolutes

A Model for Making Moral Decisions

- The **first step** of the model is to gather the facts.
- The two primary questions that need to be asked in order to make an intelligent ethical decision are:
 - What do we know?
 - What do we need to know?

- The **second step** is to determine the ethical issues involved in causing the dilemma.
- Ethical dilemmas are produced when, in any given situation, one has to choose between two or more competing moral interests.
- When thinking about the decision at hand it is valuable to place it in an X versus Y format in order to reflect the competing interests.

- The **third step** requires you to determine what virtues or principles have a bearing on the case.
- List the virtues and moral values that are germane to the issue at hand.
- The virtues and principles will come from a variety of sources.
- The purpose of this step is to help you think through what virtues and principles you think should be satisfied by your decision.
- **Be aware of emotional attachment.** Not necessarily to discount it, but to acknowledge your emotional attachment and others to an outcome.
- **Make it a community engagement in the church,** consult wise moral people, others who made a decision and what hindsight taught them.

- The **fourth step** of the model is to list the alternative courses of action to resolve the dilemma.
- Some alternatives will be immediately ruled out due to the fact that they are immoral!

- The **fifth step** of the model begins to eliminate alternatives.
- This is done based on the moral principles relevant to the case.
- At this point, it may be the case that a clear decision can be made due to the fact that all alternatives but one have been ruled out.
- Weighing of values and virtues may be required.

- The **sixth step** of the model is required when a resolution to the dilemma is not produced at the fifth stage.
- If virtues and values do make the decision clear, then one needs to consider the consequences.
- The option most beneficial and causing the least amount of harm needs to be given serious consideration.

- The **seventh step** of the model brings the process to a close.
- A decision is made and acted upon.
- In all likelihood the decision will still be a difficult one despite using the model.
- The final decision will probably involve some negative consequences.
- **Recognize most moral decisions are made in a moment**, emerging from our habits. Cultivate the character continually in anticipation of a decision that may come.

Questions and Case Studies

- How do you understand the relationship between the law in the OT and the kingdom of God in the NT?
- What do you think is the central virtue of Christian ethics?
- How would you resolve the dilemmas faced by Rahab and Corrie ten Boom?
- Give some biblical support for the mandate to pursue justice for the oppressed and vulnerable. What are challenges Christians face today to applying these passages?
- Ugandan church example
- Dilemma #1: man to be laid off
- Dilemma #2: old woman with cancer
- Dilemma #3: International Business Ethics