

FALSE DOCTRINES ABOUT HUMAN CONDUCT

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All rational people, to a greater or lesser degree, are concerned with human ethical conduct. How we act and are acted upon, with respect to our fellow man, determines the progress and happiness of mankind and, ultimately, contributes to human destiny. In considering the matter of human moral activity, several vital questions must be considered.

- By definition, what is morality?
- Is an ethical code a necessity for human existence?
- What is the origin of ethics?
- Does morality possess a motivating purpose?
- How does one determine what is ethical or unethical?
- Is morality absolute or relative?
- What are the consequences of immoral behavior?

These queries, and possibly others, will be addressed in this article.

DEFINING MORALITY/ETHICS

Morality is “the character of being in accord with the principles or standards of right conduct.” **Ethics** generally is viewed as the system or code by which attitudes and actions are determined to be either right or wrong. Even non-Christian philosophers are forced to so define ethics. For example, Henry Sidgwick, a nineteenth-century hedonistic philosopher, saw ethics as a rational procedure for determining what individual human beings ought to seek to realize by voluntary action. Again, ethics is sometimes defined as the justification of criteria by which one human life can be judged to be better or worse than another (Henry, 1973, p. 220).

Morality/ethics, then, asserts that there is **differentiation** between right and wrong and between good and evil. Moreover, by implication, there is an appeal to some **standard** by which these character traits are distinguished.

IS MORALITY A NECESSITY?

So far as creatures of the Earth are concerned, morality is universally and uniquely a human trait. Animals do not operate according to any ethical code. A dog has no pangs of conscience when he steals a bone from another dog; a cock knows no remorse when mortally wounding another. Men, however, have conscience. Even unbelievers concede as much. For example, although evolutionist George Gaylord Simpson argued that “man is the result of a purposeless and materialistic process that did not have him in mind,” nonetheless, he admitted that “good and evil, right and wrong, concepts irrelevant in nature except from the human viewpoint, become **real** and **pressing** features of the whole cosmos as viewed morally because **morals arise only in man**” (1951, p. 179, emp. added).

The existence of, and need for, morality thus are apparent. No sane person will argue that absolutely anything goes. The expressions ought and ought not are as much a part of the atheist’s vocabulary as anyone else’s. One may indeed become so insensitive that he abandons virtually all of his personal ethical obligations, but he never will ignore the lack of such in those who would abuse him!

THE ORIGIN OF ETHICS

Since it is universally evident that morality exists, the intriguing question is: Whence its origin? First, it is clear that raw matter is impotent to evolve any sense of moral consciousness. Note Simpson’s inadvertent admission of this point: “Discovery that the universe apart from man or before his coming lacks and lacked any purpose or plan has the inevitable corollary that **the workings of the universe cannot provide any automatic, universal, eternal, or absolute ethical criteria of right and wrong** (1951, p. 180, emp. added). Unbelief thus contends, and must, that there is no ultimate standard of ethical truth; all ”morality” is relative.

And so, there are but two options as to the origin of ethics. Morality is either: **theocentric**, that is, it is centered in an eternal source of goodness, namely, God; or ethics is **anthropocentric**, that is grounded in the mere mind of man—a creature that has evolved naturally from inanimate forces.

Presently, I shall show the horrendous consequences that result from affirming that man is his own source of morality, but first I affirm, in harmony with the Bible, that, in truth, morality is thoroughly theological.

Though proof of God's existence is abundantly evident in the wonderfully designed Universe [called *kosmos* by the Greeks, "from its perfect order and arrangement," and so, the opposite of chaos (Liddell and Scott, 1869, p. 875)], His character is made known only in His verbal communications available to us in biblical documents. Thus, the Bible declares that God is eternal (Psalm 90:2; 1 Timothy 1:17) and that He is morally perfect. Not only is God holy (Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8), just and righteous (Psalm 89:14), and good (Psalm 100:6; 106:1), but in the ultimate sense, **only** God is good (Mark 10:18). Since the God of the Bible is perfect (Matthew 5:48), it is to be expected that all that proceeds from Him is initially good. Accordingly, that which He created was good (Genesis 1:31), and all that He does, commands, and approves likewise is good (Psalm 119:39,68).

The "good," therefore, is what God is, and what He has commanded results from what He is, and thus likewise is good. In the Old Testament, the prophet Micah declared: "He [God] showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth Jehovah require of thee, but to do justly, and to love kindness, and walk humbly with thy God" (Micah 6:8). Similarly, in the New Testament Peter admonished: "As he who called you is holy, be ye yourselves also holy in all manner of living; because it is written, 'Ye shall be holy: for I am holy'" (1 Peter 1:15).

Professor S.J. Mikolaski summarized this point beautifully: "New Testament morality is not based on situation ethics; instead, it is based on human conduct as being subject to a standard of unconditional value—namely, the righteousness of God. The personification of this standard in human life is the incarnate Lord, who lived His life in the Spirit" (1979, 1:477).

By way of contrast, how does atheism explain the origin of morality? Since the unbeliever does not believe that there is an eternal Mind with which goodness is coexistent, i.e., an intrinsically moral Being, he obviously must contend that somehow raw, eternal, inorganic matter (and there is no such thing!) was able, by means of an extended process, to concoct, promote, and maintain morality. Such a theory is self-

defeating because it assumes that man, with that evolved mass of cerebral tissue between his ears, is capable of “discovering” moral truth. Dare we trust a “naked ape” (to use Desmond Morris’ colorful expression) to formulate ethics? As Charles Darwin expressed it, “Can the mind of man, which has, as I fully believe, been developed from a mind as low as that possessed by the lowest animals, be trusted when it draws such grand conclusions?” (1898, 1:282). He further declared that “there is no fundamental difference between man and the higher mammals in their mental faculties” (1902, p. 64).

Finally, it may be observed that if morality is man-authorized, hence, man-centered, it is utterly impossible to argue for any system (singular) of ethics to which one consistently could urge his fellows to subscribe. Rather, **billions** of ethical systems would exist—as many as there are people—each frequently at variance with the others, yet, oddly, each equally valid. Thus, who could ever charge logically that another’s conduct was “wrong” or that a man “ought not” to do thus and so? The simple fact of the matter is this—infidelity cannot reasonably explain the origin of ethics.

THE PURPOSE OF MORALITY

The purpose of morality is connected inseparably with the purpose of life itself. British novelist Somerset Maugham forcefully emphasized this in the following passage: “If...one put aside the existence of God and the possibility of survival as too doubtful to have any effect on one’s behavior, one has to make up one’s mind what is the meaning of life. If death ends all, if I have neither to hope for good to come nor to fear evil, I must ask myself what I am here for and how in these circumstances I must conduct myself” (1963, pp. 181-82).

If there is no purpose in the Universe, as Simpson asserted in the quotation introduced earlier, then there is no purpose in ethics. But the concept of a purposeless ethic does not make sense, and so men have sought to read some meaning, as far-fetched as it may be, into the natural human inclination to recognize the need for morality. Let us give brief attention to several of these theories that propose to explain the function of human ethics.

Hedonism

Hedonism is the philosophy which argues that the aim of moral conduct is the attainment of the greatest possible pleasure with the greatest possible avoidance of pain. The moral criterion ultimately is the relative preponderance of pleasure over pain. A phase of hedonism, known as psychological hedonism, contends that one can act **only** in the manner described above. If that is the case, how could one's actions be considered as "moral" in such circumstances? A man hardly can be viewed as moral for doing that which he cannot help doing!

But hedonism is woefully inconsistent, and its advocates rarely, if ever, will stay with its logical conclusions. What if one, in the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain, must inflict pain upon others in order to achieve the goal? In other words, what if one must act **immorally** in order to practice his **moral-ity**? What is there about hedonism that would motivate a person to forego his own pleasure in the interest of others. Absolutely nothing! Unbelievers have found this point a difficult matter with which to deal. Concerning this, agnostic Bertand Rusell frustratingly wrote:

We feel that the man who brings widespread happiness at the expense of misery to himself is a better man than the man who brings unhappiness to others and happiness to himself. **I do not know of any rational ground for this view**, or, perhaps, for the somewhat more rational view that whatever the majority desires (called utilitarian hedonism) is preferable to what the minority desires. These are truly ethical problems but I do not know of any way in which they can be solved except by politics or war. All that I can find to say on this subject is that an ethical opinion **can only be defended by an ethical axiom, but, if the axiom is not accepted, there is no way of reaching a rational conclusion** (1969, 3:29, emp. added).

Besides that, what if I am simply an egotistical hedonist and thus announce, "I care not at all for others; I intend to live my life solely for my own pleasure with no consideration for others save when such is in my **own** interest!" "But," someone will doubtless respond, "that is so selfish." So, what is wrong with selfishness if it brings me pleasure? Atheistic philosopher Ayn Rand even authored a book titled *The Virtue of Selfishness—A New Concept of Egoism*.

Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism, advocated by Jeremy Bentham, J.S. Mill, and others, was built upon the foundation of hedonism. It argues that "good" is that which gives pleasure to the greatest number of people. Again, however, the theory is seriously flawed at several places. First, it cannot answer the vital query: If pleas-

ure to the greatest number of people prevents a man from achieving his own personal pleasure, what is there to motivate him toward the pleasure of the many? Second, utilitarianism provides no guideline to determine what the “pleasure” (genuine happiness) of the many actually is. Third, it is the philosophy that stands behind, and is perfectly consistent with, numerous atrocities perpetrated in the alleged interest of humanity. When Hitler slaughtered countless millions and bred people like animals in behalf of evolving his master race, he felt he was operating in the genuine interest of mankind as a whole. Communism similarly justified its massacres in the advancement of its social system. The principle is: If some have to suffer for the ultimate good to be accomplished, so what? Of course the leaders of such movements “know” what the ultimate good is!

Finally, though, this idea cannot provide any rational reason as to why it would be “wrong” just to ignore what is in the interest of the many and, as stated earlier, simply pursue one’s personal pleasure. There is an interesting commentary on this point in Katherine Tait’s recently published book, *My Father Bertrand Russell*. Mrs. Tait was the only daughter of English agnostic Bertrand Russell. She was born in London in 1923 and was educated at her parents innovative school, Beacon Hill, an institution dedicated to the promotion of atheistic humanism. In this fascinating volume, Tait attempted to explain what it was like being the renowned philosopher’s daughter.

For example, Russell believed that a parent must teach his child “with its very first breath that it has entered into a moral world” (Tait, 1975, p. 59). Yet, as with all atheists/agnostics, he had a most difficult time explaining **why**, if man is merely the product of natural forces, children should be taught mortality. Tait recalled that as a child she might say, in connection with some moral responsibility, “I don’t want to! Why should I?” A conventional parent, she observes, might reply, “Because I say so...your father says so...God says so...” Russell, however, would say to his children: “Because more people will be happy if you do than if you don’t.” “So what,” Katherine would respond, “I don’t care about other people.” But her father would declare, “You should!” In her innocence, young Katherine would inquire, “But **why**?” To which the redundant rejoinder would be, “Because more people will be happy if you do than if you don’t.” Tait noted, “We felt the heavy pressure of his rectitude and obeyed, but the reason was not con-

vincing—neither to us nor to him” (pp. 184-185). Indeed! Such specious reasoning will convince no one who thinks beyond the superficial level.

Evolutionary Survival

Others contend that morality has been developed in the scheme of evolution as a means of survival.

Ayn Rand wrote:

An animal is equipped for sustaining, its senses provide it with an automatic code of action.... It has no power to expand its knowledge or to evade it. In conditions where its knowledge proves inadequate, it dies. But so long as it live, it acts on its knowledge with automatic safety and no power of choice, it is unable to ignore its own good.

Man has no automatic code of survival.... He has no automatic knowledge of what is good for him or evil, what values his life depend on, what course of action it requires (1957, p. 939).

This view certainly raises some interesting questions. First of all, **when**—as man gradually became man in his evolutionary ascendancy—was this marvelous “automatic” ability to chose the good lost? Even more importantly, **why** was it lost? If an organism possesses an automatic system for determining the “good” that will ensure its survival, why should such ever be lost and thus need to be replaced by a manual system (i.e., the power of moral choice which admittedly is prone to mistakes?) The very essence of the evolutionary scheme is supposed to be its uncanny ability to select and retain those features that enable it to survive. Would it therefore not have been better if man had retained his “automatic” capacity to make ethical choices and thereby avoided the destruction that comes in the wake of making wrong moral choices? Moreover, just how was this decision-making ability developed? No infidel can answer such questions.

Another important question is this: **who** decides just what will be the basis of survival in a competitive society? Some unbelievers have long argued that man’s survival is dependent upon culling the weak (the evolutionary principle of the survival of the fittest). Charles Darwin wrote:

With savages, the weak in body or mind are soon eliminated; and those that survive commonly exhibit a vigorous state of health. We civilized men, on the other hand, do our utmost to check the process of elimination; we build asylums for the imbecile, the maimed, and the sick; we institute poor laws; and our medical men exert their utmost skill to save the life of every one to the last moment. There is reason to believe that vaccination has preserved thousands, who from a weak constitution would formerly have succumbed to smallpox. Thus the weak members of civilized societies propagate their kind. No one who has attended to the breeding of domestic animals will doubt that this must be highly injurious to the race of man (1859, p. 130, emp. added).

The point is: No one, with any degree of logical consistency, can draw any moral lines against the person who acts in an outrageous way if that person claims that his actions result from his personal sense of survival!

THE BIBLICAL SOLUTION

The truth of the matter is that only the Biblical approach to morality can explain the **purpose of**, and, therefore provide adequate **motivation for**, life on a genuinely ethical plane. As we have indicated already, moral sensitivity (an awareness that right and wrong exist) has been implanted in the soul of man by virtue of his creation in God's (Who is eternally good) image. Though created upright, man, a being of free willpower, has fallen from his lofty estate. Accordingly, God, by means of divine revelation, seeks to bring man back into harmony with Himself, and this entails both religious and moral obligations.

Biblical morality has several thrusts: (a) It is designed to develop within man right **attitudes**, or to say it another way, a divine level of thinking; (b) Too, it is intended to help humanity translate spiritual attitudes into **actions** that will be helpful to all others; (c) Finally, the desired result is to guide man back into accord with the divine ideal, thus ensuring his present contentment, and ultimately his supreme happiness, to the glory of God.

Additionally, we may confidently affirm that biblical revelation provides a sufficient motive for moral human conduct. Those who have not foolishly thrust God from their minds (Psalm 14:1) acknowledge that the creation testifies of Deity's existence (Romans 1:20-21), and that His orderly Universe is evidence of His good (Acts 14:17; James 1:17) and loving nature. God is love (1 John 4:8). The love of God in providing Christ (John 3:16) for sinful man and the love of Jesus in offering Himself to redeem us (Revelation 1:5, Philippians 2:5ff.) are motive aplenty for our attempting to lead a moral life. We love, hence, obey (John 14:15) Him because He First loved us (1 John 4:10,11,19). The Scriptures provide both purpose and motive for their ethical base, whereas, unbelief has neither.

SOME PROPOSED CRITERIA FOR ETHICS

All theories regarding morality assume some standard by which moral judgments are made. Whether that standard is "pleasure," "majority opinion," "survival," etc., these theories all have one thing in com-

mon. They assume some sort of ethical “yardstick” by which conduct is measured. I now shall give brief attention to several of these proposed “standards” to see how they fare in the light of logical scrutiny.

Nihilism

Nihilism is the notion that since “there is no God,” there can be no rational justification for ethical norms. Advocates of this viewpoint, like Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), the philosophical influence behind Hitler, have contended that nihilism is the condition which allows that “everything is permitted.” Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevski, in his work, *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880), has one of his characters, Ivan, say that if God is dead, everything is allowed! Existential philosopher, Jean Paul Sartre wrote: “Everything is indeed permitted if God does not exist, and man is in consequence forlorn, for he cannot find anything to depend upon either within or outside himself.... Nor, on the other hand, if God does not exist, are we provided with any values or commands that could legitimize our behavior” (1961, p. 485). Sartre contended that **whatever** one chooses to do is right; value is attached to the choice itself so that “we can never choose evil” (1966, p. 279). These men are absolutely right about one thing. If there is no God, “anything goes” is the name of the game!

The hypocrisy of this phony dogma, however, is revealed by the fact that the propagators of such an idea really mean “everything is permitted” for **them alone**. They do not mean that the theft of **their** property, the rape of **their** wives, and the slitting of **their** throats is “permitted!”

Relativism

Moral relativism rejects the idea that there can be universal criteria for determining values. All value systems are thought to be culturally originated and conditioned, hence, all cultural ethical systems are equally valid. No moral system, it is claimed, can be said to be either true or false.

Again, though, relativism falls of its own weaknesses, and its proponents will not stay with it. What if a particular culture, e.g., the “Bible Belt,” believes that ethics is **absolute**? Would the relativists yield to that? Perish the thought! In some cultures infanticide is deemed a proper form of population control. Is that then “right” for them? What of slavery? Abuse of women? Where is the relativist who will stand up and openly declare the morality of such practices?

Situationism

Situationism (commonly known as “situation ethics”) also repudiates the concept of any absolute system of values. For our present purpose, we can divide situationists into two classes—atheists and theists.

The atheistic position is perhaps best expressed in that infamous document known as *Humanist Manifestos I and II*. Written in 1933 and 1973, respectively, and signed by such notables as John Dewey, Isaac Asimov, Francis Crick, Julian Huxley, Antony Flew, and others, it contains the following statements: “We affirm that moral values derive their source from human experience. Ethics is **autonomous**, and **situational**, needing no theological or ideological sanction. Ethics stems from human needs and interests. To deny this distorts the whole basis of life.” (1977, p. 17, emp. in orig.)

A more contradictory and absurd position would be difficult to conceive. Let us briefly analyze the statement. If one argues that ethics is **situational**, he is suggesting that an act cannot be judged by an absolute standard and that its rightness or wrongness is dependent upon the situation. For example, it would be wrong to lie if that falsehood was hurtful to others; however, if the lie could be helpful, it is said, then it would be right. However, as previously indicated, morality is alleged to be **autonomous**. That word means “self law.” It means that every man is his own law. If that is the case, how could there ever be a situation in which a person could do wrong? **Human ethical autonomy and situational morality are mutually exclusive!**

Then there is theistic situation ethics, most popularly expounded by Joseph Fletcher. Fletcher claimed that situation ethics is a sort of the middle-of-the-road position between the extremes of “antinomianism” (no ethical rules exist) and “legalism” (moral decisions may be made by appealing to a rule book, e.g., the Bible (1966, p. 55)). For him, “love” is the sole factor in making moral judgments. It must be noted, though, that his “love” is purely **subjective**—each individual must decide for himself, in a given context, what the loving course is.

The theory is fraught with insuperable logical difficulties. First, it affirms, “there are absolutely no absolutes.” Are you sure? “Absolutely!” It claims there are no rules save the rule to love, yet by their own

rules the situationists would define love. Second, God is removed from the throne as the moral Sovereign of the Universe, and man is enthroned in His place. Man, then, with his own subjective sense of “love,” makes all final moral judgments. It thus ignores the biblical view that man is lacking in sufficient wisdom to guide his earthly activities (Jeremiah 10:23). Third, Fletcher’s situationism assumes a sort of omniscience in the application of his “love” principle. For example, the theory contends that lying, adultery, murder, etc., could be “moral” if done within the context of love. Yet, who is able to predict the consequences of such acts and determine, in advance, what is the “loving” thing to do? Let us imagine the following case.

A young woman, jilted by her lover, is in a state of great depression. A married man, with whom she works, decides to “have an affair” with her in order to comfort her. Fletcher would argue that what he did might very well have been a noble deed, for the man acted out of concern for his friend. What a myopic viewpoint! Let us consider the rest of the story. The man’s wife learned of his adulterous adventure, could not cope with the situation, and eventually committed suicide. One of his sons, disillusioned by the immorality of his father and the death of his mother, began a life of crime and finally was imprisoned for the murder of three people. Another son became a drunkard and was killed in an auto accident that also claimed the lives of a mother and two children. Now tell us that the initial act of adultery was ultimately the “loving” thing to do!

Fourth, situationism assumes the “love” is some sort of ambiguous, no-rule essence that is a cure-all for moral problems. That is like suggesting that two football teams play a game in which there will be no rules except the rule of “fairness.” Fairness according to whose judgment? Team A? Team B? The referees? The spectators? That is utter nonsense! Fifth, even when one suggests that “love” be the criterion for ethical decisions, he presupposes some standard for determining what love is. Situationists contradict themselves at every turn of the road.

Determinism

Another false concept regarding human conduct is determinism. Determinism, whether it be social, biological, or theological, has a necessary logical consequence—it absolves man of personal responsibility for his conduct. Let us consider several facts of this general thesis.

Behaviorism, as developed by John Watson, a psychologist at John Hopkins (1878-1958), argued that personality, hence conduct, is the end product of our habit system. Watson taught that man is merely an animal resulting from the evolutionary process. B.F. Skinner of Harvard was the leading proponent of behaviorism. He believed that man, the animal, is the product of environment, and so even to speak of human responsibility was nonsense in his view. A practical example of these theories was seen in Clarence Darrow's defense of murderers Leopold and Loeb, who killed 14-year-old Bobby Franks as an "experiment." Darrow argued that they were in no way responsible for their act since brutal forces of their past had shaped their destiny (Weinberg, 1957, pp. 16-88).

Sociobiology is a newer notion that attempts to synthesize the social sciences with biology. It sees man as a mere machine, somewhat analogous to a computer, who has been programmed by his genetic makeup. His behavior is the result of physical and chemical forces, and, as we do not hold a machine accountable, so neither should we man.

A few comments concerning these ideas are in order. First, if determinism is true, there is no such thing as human responsibility! This is a necessary corollary of the theory. In spite of this, determinists frequently speak, write, and act as though human accountability existed. Consistency is a rare jewel among them. Second, if man is not responsible for his actions, such terms as "good" and "evil" are meaningless. Third, if man is not accountable, no one ever should be punished for robbery, rape, child abuse, murder, etc. Do we punish a machine that maims or kills a person? Fourth, how can we be expected to be persuaded by the doctrine of determinism, since the determinists were "programmed" to teach their ideas, and these may not be true at all. Fifth, determinists will not stand by their doctrine. If I recopied Edward Wilson's book, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*, and had it published in my name, I quickly would find out whether Wilson thought I was responsible for the action or if only my genetic background was!

Theological determinism is otherwise known as Augustinianism or Calvinism. Augustine, and those who have followed him, affirm(ed) “that man’s will is not in fact free for obedience and faith till freed from sin’s dominion by regenerating grace” (i.e., a supernatural operation of the Spirit) [Packer, 1960, p. 230].

This doctrine is contradicted by literally hundreds of Bible passages that command unregenerated people to be responsive to the will of God. How utterly ignorant it is to suggest that Jehovah actually has commanded man to do that which he is totally impotent to perform! Then the Lord condemns him because he does not do it. What a reflection upon both the wisdom and character of our Maker.

IS THERE ULTIMATE MORAL RESPONSIBILITY

Here is a crucial question that must be addressed. Is there any ultimate consequence to immorality? Atheists are fond of saying that one should not be unethical because of social sanctions, i.e., society’s disapproval, legal punishment, etc. The implication is that unethical conduct is “bad” only because you might get caught! I once asked an atheist this question: “Paul, the apostle of Christ, and Adolf Hitler are two well-known historical characters. Both now are dead. So far as they are concerned, does it really make any difference that they lived their lives in such divergent directions?” He replied that it did not! If that is the case, human existence makes no sense whatsoever. That is infidelity’s position, of course. As the French philosopher Pascal observed, “It is certain that the morality or immorality of the soul must make an entire difference to morality. And yet philosophers have constructed their ethics independently of this: they discuss to pass an hour” (n.d.). In his *Diary of a Writer*, Dostoevski noted: “Neither a man nor a nation can live without a ‘higher idea,’ and there is only one such idea on earth, that of an immortal human soul: all other ‘higher ideas’ by which men live follow from that...” (as quoted in Berdyaer, 1934, p. 105).

SOME CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

In this article, we have been considering human moral obligations. The fact that we have been considering morality is unique to our kind. No two apes ever sat down and said, “Let’s talk about ethical ob-

ligations today.” That ought to say something about our nature! As we draw toward a closing, there are some important summary observations that must be mentioned.

1. Human moral responsibility is based upon the fact that God is our Creator (Psalm 100:3) and that we have been made in His spiritual image (Genesis 1:26). Just as a potter has a right over the clay he is fashioning, so our Maker has the right to obligate us, morally and spiritually, to right living (cf. Romans 9:21).

2. Since morality is grounded in the unchanging nature of God (Malachi 3:6; 1 Peter 1:15), it is absolute—not cultural, not relative, not situational.

3. God’s will for human behavior is not a matter of subjective speculation that every man figures out for himself; rather, Jehovah has spoken (Hebrews 1:1), and His Mind is made known in objective, biblical revelation (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:11ff.; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

4. Though the Lord possesses an unchanging nature, His revelatory process was progressive and adapted to man as he spiritually developed in those times of antiquity. Accordingly, in ages of the past Jehovah tolerated (and even regulated) certain acts that are not permissible in the Christian era. This, of course, does not mean that God vacillates in His morality; it simply means that He dealt with man as he was in that infantile state (Matthew 19:8; Acts 14:16; 17:30-31). Today, the New Testament stands as the Lord’s final and ultimate standard of morality.

5. Though the New Testament is the “law of Christ” (Romans 8:2; Galatians 6:2), it is not a “legal” system in that each aspect of human conduct is prescribed with a “thou shalt” or “thou shalt not.” Yes, there are both positive and negative commands in the New Testament, but they do not spell out every specific activity. The inspired document contains many rich principles that challenge us to develop a greater sense of spiritual maturity and to soar to heights that are God-honoring. As an example, although the Scriptures do not say, “thou shalt not gamble,” there are spiritual guidelines aplenty that will lead the godly person to refrain from such practices (see Jackson, 1977, pp. 117-126).

6. One must recognize also that New Testament ethics does not deal merely with actions; it addresses motives as well. For instance, what if one accidentally runs down with his auto (and thereby kills) a care-

less pedestrian? He is not held accountable before God, for his act was unintentional. On the other hand, one can be guilty of both adultery and murder in disposition (cf. Matthew 5:28; 1 John 3:15).

7. It is imperative that men recognize that ethical activity (i.e., right relations with one's fellows) is not the totality of a person's obligation before God. The centurion Cornelius certainly learned this truth (Acts 10). There are spiritual responsibilities that the Lord has prescribed as a test of true faith (such as the command to be immersed in water for the remission of sins, Acts 2:38), and yet men frequently ignore such divine obligations.

8. Finally, this surely should be noted. Even though the Almighty has called His human creation to a high moral level, we must recognize that He is aware that we are but frail, dusty flesh (Psalm 78:39; 103:14). And so His marvelous grace has been revealed in the unspeakably wonderful gift of His Son. Those who in loving faith submit to Him (Hebrews 5:8-9) can know the pardon of their moral blunders (Acts 22:16) and are challenged to live righteous and godly lives in this present world (Titus 2:11-14).

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