

ST MATTHEWS SMALL GROUP STUDIES:

EVERYDAY MORALITY

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1: Introduction to Christian Ethics by Tracy Lauersen

# Everyday Morality: Introduction to Christian Ethics

Study

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**E**thics is the study of right and wrong and of standards of morality (World Book Dictionary). Morality has to do with our character and our behavior, our behavior relating to our self and to others (From Christ to the World, p 2).



Rodin: The Thinker

Socrates, born in 427 BC taught that the most important question for a person to answer for themselves is “What sort of life is worth living?” Plato and Aristotle, coming after Socrates thought through the same question and wrote down some of their thinking. All people participate to some extent in examining this question for their own lives. An argument with a friend, thoughts about our responsibilities as employees, decisions about careers, the way we spend our money and time- are driven by the question of how we live our life. These can be summarized as moral questions, and the examination and study of morality is called Ethics. *Normative ethics* is the study of norms, standards, right and wrong behavior. All ethics is influenced by our particular world view.

## Try it out

Imagine the following scenario

Stefi, the English faculty head in the secondary school in a poor area of Melbourne has come across some educational software which would greatly enhance the effectiveness of the faculties English language program. Many of the students at the school are recently arrived immigrants and the software uses an effective interactive language teaching tool which could spell success at language learning for many of the immigrant students. The faculty budget is not big enough to purchase the software. A friend of Stefi’s works at a well heeled grammar school where they use the software with some of their boarders. The friend agrees to make copies of the software so that Stefi can make it available to her students.

Identify the possible right and wrong actions in this scenario and analyse the attitudes and worldviews which influence your assessment. (Adapted from *What’s in and Issue*, p 51)

**C**hristian Ethics is the study of morality with reference to God, and in particular, to the teachings of Jesus Christ. John Stott, in his book *Issues facing Christians Today* presents a case for Christian involvement in ethical issues based on the following doctrines:

**1. A full doctrine of God which encompasses**

- ❖ God's concern for the whole of humankind and human life. The Bible shows us a God who is concerned for the secular as well as the sacred, for nature as well as the spiritual. Everything is God's concern because it all belongs to God. God made the universe and still calls it good (Gen 1:31; 1 Tim 4:4).
- ❖ God's concern for all nations as well as his covenant people. Read Amos 9:7 and Daniel 4:32. Recall that the bible starts with Adam, not with Abraham.
- ❖ God's concern for justice as well as justification. Read Psalm 146:7-9

**2. A full doctrine of human beings.** Deciding on the fate of human beings (in matters such as euthanasia, capital punishment, caring for the insane and the unborn) are determined by our view of them. Read Gen 9:6 and James 3:9 and write out a sentence describing the Christian view of human beings.

**3. A full doctrine of Christ.** There have been many different interpretations of Jesus throughout history, and indeed every generation. We have had Jesus the liberator, the monarch, the sufferer, the revolutionary, the teacher. Discuss aspects of a balanced and full perspective of who Jesus was and his mission. Read 2 Corinthians 11:4; Matt 4:23; 9:35; Acts 10:38; John 20:21)

**4. A full doctrine of salvation.** Stott writes (p 27)

*There is a constant tendency to trivialize the nature of salvation, as if it meant no more than a self-reformation, or the forgiveness of sins, or a personal passport to paradise, or a private mystical experience without social or moral consequences....Salvation is a radical transformation in three phases, beginning at our conversion, continuing through our earthly life and brought to perfection when Christ comes. He goes on We must not separate Jesus the Saviour from Jesus the Lord. Jesus saves and Jesus is Lord, and he is Lord not only of the religious bit of our lives. Finally, Stott says, we must not separate faith from love. Read James*

2:17,18; 1 John 3:17; Titus 2:14; Eph 2:10; Gal 5:6,13 and finally 1 Cor 13:2. Faith and love belong together.

**5. A full doctrine of the Church.** The church is not a club for religious people. We are called to be holy, but to play out that holiness in the world in which we live. Contrast these passages: John 17:11-19; Matt 5:13-16; 1 Peter 2:11-17.

### Exercise

Each member (or pair) needs a double page spread of the News section of the daily newspaper for this exercise (The Finance section may have articles of interest as well). They also need some notepaper and pens.

Each person/pair should scan their paper, looking to assess articles from two perspectives.

1. What does a Christian view (as discussed in our study above) bring to bear on this issue?
2. What Christian action if any, could be taken on this issue?

Spend time discussing and taking notes alone/in pairs, and then as a large group, discuss one item from each individual/pair.

Conclusion:

1. What, if anything, does this exercise reveal about the relationship between issues in the world and our Christian faith?
2. What, if anything, would anyone like to do this week as a result of our discussion?

### An Evangelical historical Perspective

During the nineteenth century, in Britain and America and through mission work in Africa and Asia, Christian people were involved in social reform. Social reform featured heavily in the evangelical revivals led by Wesley in Britain and Finney in the US. Wesley was described as the “man who restored to a nation its soul”. Social reforms affected such areas as slavery, prison reform, the treatment of animals, gambling reforms, political bribery and corruption, conditions in mines and factories, education and its availability to the poor. Christians campaigned these causes.

#### Further research:

Watch the movie *Amazing Grace* about the work of Christian politician William Wilberforce in the UK in the eighteenth century.

Read some more theology: Martin Luther: Treatise on Christian Liberty: available in full text online at:

[http://www.lgmarshall.org/Reformed/luther\\_liberty.html](http://www.lgmarshall.org/Reformed/luther_liberty.html)

Read John Stott's *Issues Facing Christians Today* and his first two chapters about Christian involvement and action in society.