



AN INTRODUCTION TO
CHRISTIAN ETHICS



Introduction

Last week, I introduced you to *The Triangle of Necessary and Sufficient Conditions* and echoed Dr. John Frame's proposition that "every ethical decision involves the application of a law (norm, principle) to a situation (facts), by a person (self)." I want to underscore that it was just that - an introduction. The field of ethics spans centuries and claims the writings of many philosophers and ethicists who make competing claims that *their* system of ethics is the most compelling. Thrasymachus (c. 459-400 B.C.), for instance, the ancient Greek philosopher, believed that right is found in might. Additionally, Dr. Norman Geisler identified the following non-Christian systems which are still accepted, promoted, and followed in various places throughout the world:



Introduction

- **Morals are Mores** (what is morally right is determined by the culture to which one belongs);
- **Man is the Measure of All Things** (each person is the standard for right and wrong);
- **The Human Race (as a whole) is the Basis of Right** (i.e., humankind is the measure of all things);
- **Right is Moderation** (Aristotle's "the golden mean" or moderate course of action between two extremes);
- **Right is What Brings Pleasure** (hedonism);
- **Right is the Greatest Good for the Greatest Number** (utilitarianism);
- **Right is Indefinable** (all we can say is "good is good").



Introduction

By listing these contradictory ethical systems, it is clear that none of them can assert the claim that theirs is *the* right approach. Therefore, one might hopelessly come to the conclusion that it is impossible to embrace *any* system. However, when we consider the eternal existence of the triune God and embrace the truth that He has clearly spoken through Creation, His only-begotten Son, the *imago Dei*, and His inspired, infallible, inerrant, and authoritative Word, it is not difficult to accept the reality that we can actually “think His thoughts after Him” (analogical thinking) and live our lives in ways that are pleasing to Him. That is, we can accept biblical ethics based on God’s lordship and self-disclosure. Ultimately, “everyone who rejects divine authority must accept some other authority” (Frame).

Introduction

At this point, I should make it clear that this is not a course on the history of ethics nor an examination of every ethical system, although we will touch on other models throughout. Rather, I am intentionally bringing a distinctly Christian ethical model before you, convinced that this model (and this one alone) is capable of addressing the complex issues of epistemology, rationality, irrationality, reason, emotions, transcendence, immanence, what is right, what is good, objectivity, subjectivity, freedom, authority, etc. I am convinced that all non-Christian ethics are deficient and unable to present a cohesive answer to the ultimate questions related to Francis Schaeffer's question: "How Should We Then Live?" Our journey today will begin with a review.

The Triangle of Necessary & Sufficient Conditions

DEONTOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Christian Ethics is Triperspectival

SITUATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

EXISTENTIAL PERSPECTIVE





The Relationship Between All Three Perspectives

1. Every ethical decision involves the application of a law (norm, principle) to a situation (facts), by a person (self).
2. The situation, law, and person are part of an organic whole, together revealing God's Lordship.
3. Each perspective covers the same ground with a different emphasis.
4. The knowledge of God's law (norm), the world (situation), and the self (existential) are interdependent and ultimately identical.
5. All three perspectives represent the same knowledge viewed from three different "angles."
6. Scripture must interpret Scripture; we must read every part of the Bible in the light of the whole.

The Triangle of Necessary & Sufficient Conditions

DEONTOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Human Knowledge

1. Knowledge of God's norms
2. Knowledge of our situation
3. Knowledge of ourselves

God's
Authority

**HUMAN
KNOWLEDGE**

God's
Control

God's
Presence

None can be achieved adequately without the others. Each *includes* the others. Each, therefore, is a "perspective" on the whole of human knowledge.

SITUATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

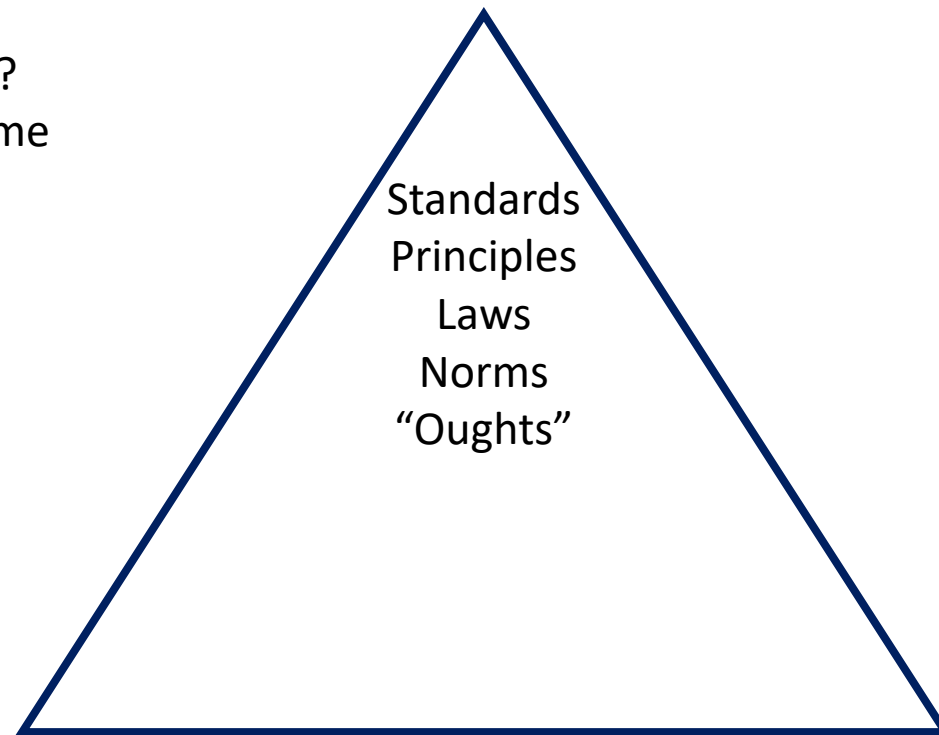
EXISTENTIAL PERSPECTIVE

The Deontological Perspective

What “Binds” Us?

We should go to Scripture to be transformed by everything in the Word.

- What does God say about it?
- What does God’s Word tell me to do?
- What norms, laws, and principles has God revealed about it?
- What is authoritative?
- God’s will revealed through nature, history, conscience, theophany, prophecy, and Scripture.

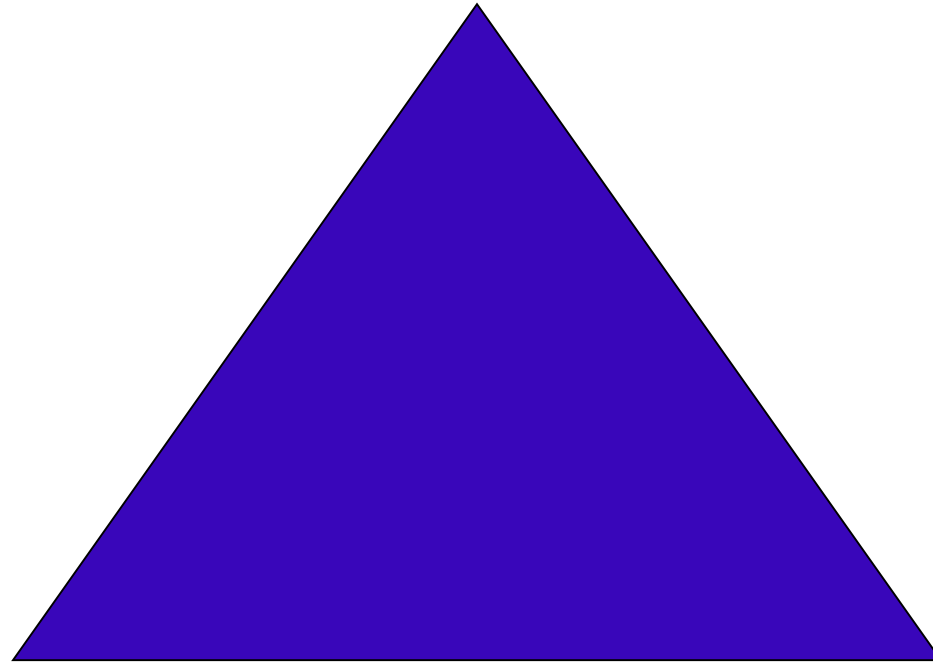


The word **deontological** is derived from the Greek word **deon**, which means “that which is binding, needful, right, proper, duty.” Deontology, then, is “that branch of knowledge which deals with moral obligations” (OED).

What “Binds” You?

DEONTOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

- Book of Mormon
- Parental Messages
- Old Testament (Jews)
- Bhagavad-Gita (Krishna)
- Koran (Islam)
- The Sayings of Confucius
- Vedas (Hindu)
- Pali Canon (Buddhism)
- University Professors



- Cultural Norms
- Government Laws
- New Age Philosophy
- Ayn Rand
- Marx
- Freud
- Benjamin Franklin
- Voltaire
- Bible

The First Question

DEONTOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

What Does the Whole Bible Say About “X”?

Law, History,
Prophecy, Gospels,
Epistles,
Poetry and Song,
Parables,
Apocalyptic Writings

SITUATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

EXISTENTIAL PERSPECTIVE

Deontology and the Bible



Dr. John Frame

1939 –

Reformed Theological Seminary
Professor of Systematic Theology and Philosophy Emeritus

“The whole Bible is law. For the whole Bible is God’s authoritative word, given to us for our instruction in righteousness, to equip us for good works. Everything in Scripture has the force of law. What it teaches, we are to believe; what it commands, we are to do. We should take its wisdom to heart, imitate its heroes, stand in awe at its symbolism, laugh at its jokes, trust in its promises, and sing its songs.”

A Contradictory Belief



Sam Harris, PhD

1967 -

American Author, Neuroscientist, and Philosopher

“Many assert that, while they can get along without an imaginary friend, most human beings will always need to believe in God. In my experience, people holding this opinion never seem to notice how condescending, unimaginative, and pessimistic a view it is of the rest of humanity – and of generations to come.”

The Foundation For Christian Ethics

- “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work” (II Tim. 3:16).
- “Knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (II Pet. 1:20-21).
- “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps. 119:105).
- “Forever, O Lord, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens” (Ps. 119:89).

How God Reveals His Ethical Norms To Us?

- **Through Nature and History.** “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork” (Ps. 19:1). “For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 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. So they are without excuse” (Rom. 1:19-20).
- **Through Persons:** Theophany, incarnation, inspiration, illumination, Scripture, human persons, imitation (human example), etc.
- **Through Special Revelation, the Word of God**

You Mean The Old Testament, Too?



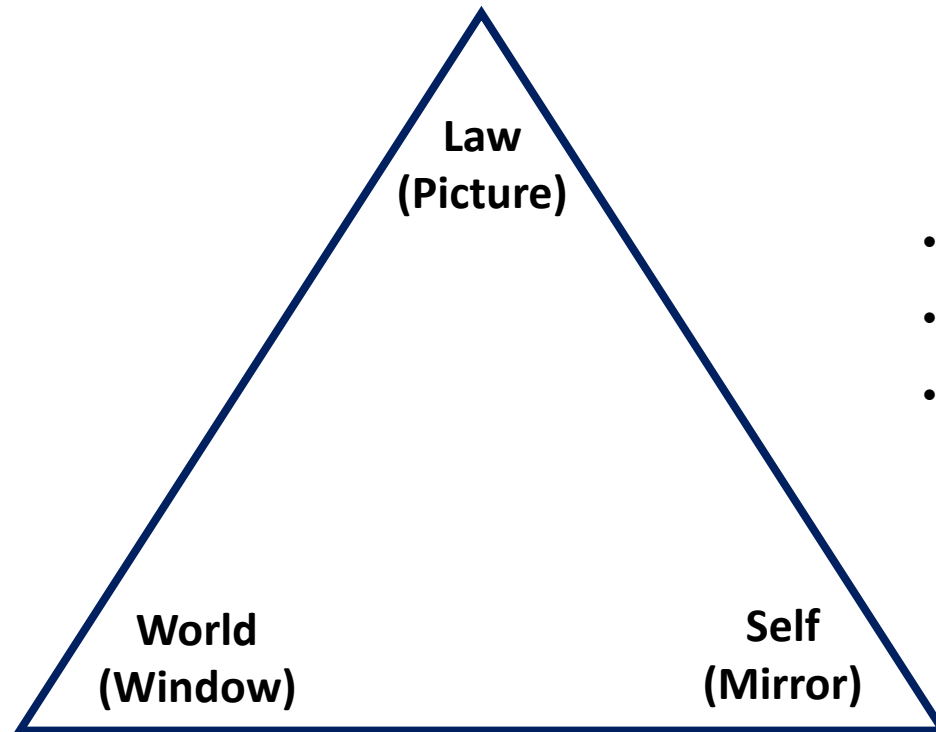
Vern S. Poythress, PhD

Professor of New Testament Interpretation
Westminster Theological Seminary

“When we read the Old Testament we should pray that Christ will both enlighten us and transform us. Because the Old Testament as well as the New is Christ’s word, we should believe what God teaches there, obey what He commands, and give thanks for the blessings and communion that He gives. Above all, we should endeavor to search out how the Old Testament speaks of Christ.”

The Triangle of Necessary & Sufficient Conditions

DEONTOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE



- Do I **understand** what God says about it?
- Will I **believe** what God says?
- Will I **obey** what God says? (To obey the Word is to obey God Himself)

SITUATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

EXISTENTIAL PERSPECTIVE

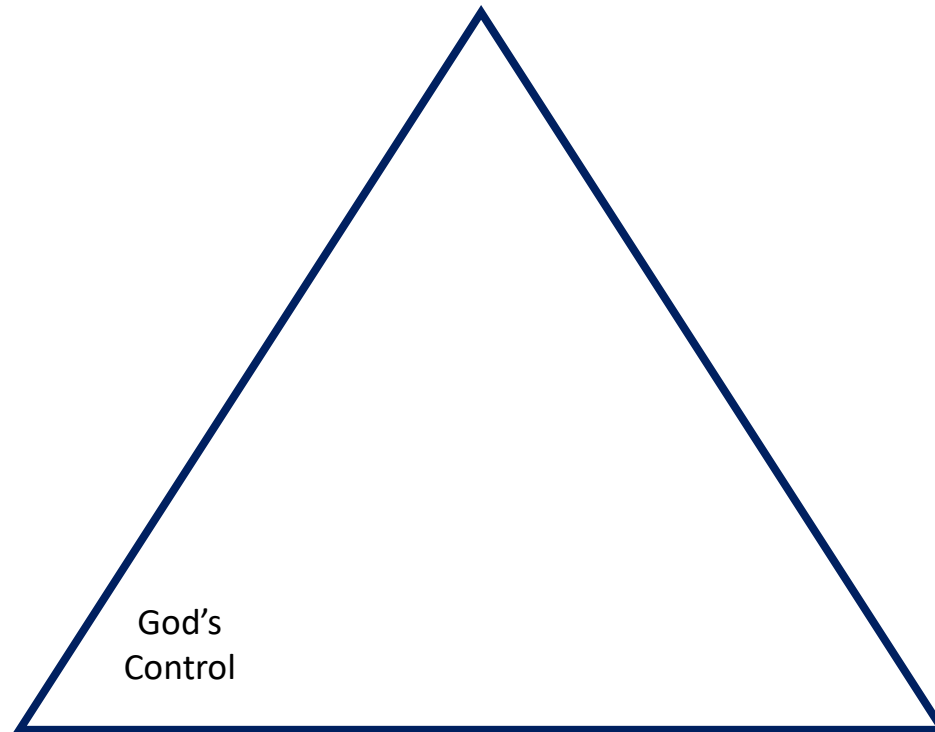
14 Excuses People Use For Disobedience To God's Word

- “That verse is open to interpretation.”
- “We’re not under the law, but under grace.”
- “The Spirit hasn’t made that verse real to me yet.”
- “That’s cultural.”
- “That’s legalistic.”
- “My denomination doesn’t believe that.”
- “I don’t know what that verse means, but it doesn’t mean what it says.”
- “I’ll pray about it.”
- “That’s only for the 1st century Christians.”
- “Oh, that’s just Paul, and he didn’t like women.”
- “I haven’t been convicted of that yet.”
- “The Spirit hasn’t revealed the truth of that verse to me yet.”
- “The Bible is not really the inspired Word of God.”
- “My pastor doesn’t teach that.”

The Triangle of Necessary & Sufficient Conditions

- Knowing God involves knowing His world – studying it.
- What are the facts of the situation?
- What are the qualities of the object? What are the God-honoring uses for the object?
- What do I learn by studying God's world (natural revelation), including His mighty acts of creation, providence, and redemption?
- God wants His people to apply His Word to their own situations.

DEONTOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

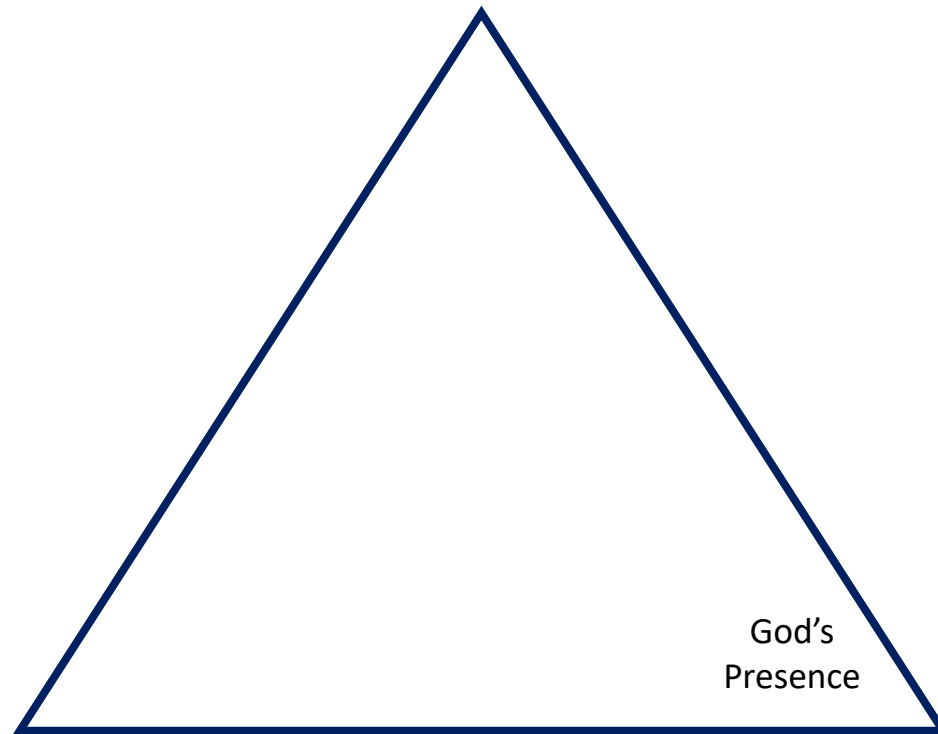


SITUATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

EXISTENTIAL PERSPECTIVE

The Triangle of Necessary & Sufficient Conditions

DEONTOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE



- “I cannot know myself rightly until I see myself as God’s image” (Frame).
- How am I a part of the problem and a part of the solution?
- What am I thinking, feeling, believing?
- What are my motives?
- Will I choose to obey?
- Have I prayed?

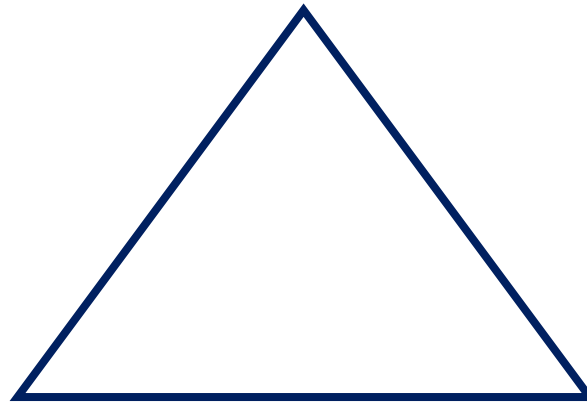
SITUATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

EXISTENTIAL PERSPECTIVE

Exercise: Should the Confederate Memorial Carving at Stone Mountain Be Removed?

DEONTOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

What does the whole Bible say about removing or keeping the Confederate Memorial Carving?



SITUATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

What are the facts of the situation?

EXISTENTIAL PERSPECTIVE

What am I thinking, feeling, believing?