AN INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIAN ETHICS

A Note on Previous Lectures

Today, in our fourth lecture on *Christian Ethics*, we will continue our study of *The Triangle of Necessary and Sufficient Conditions*. If you are new to the class, or you would like to review what you have already heard, please know that the entire series is being posted on two websites and is available to you. If you would like to listen to the previous lectures or download my notes, you may either go to:

- <u>https://tji.org/an-introduction-to-christian-ethics.html</u> or
- <u>https://www.perimeter.org/pages/connect/connect/harvesters/pages</u>
 <u>/harvesters-podcast/</u>

Introduction

As image-bearers of God, we are endowed with the ability to interact with the world which He created. We have God-given capacities and gifts to know Him and to know His creation so that we might glorify Him in all things. The foundation of our thought is God's eternal truth which He has disclosed to us through *General* and *Special* Revelation (God's world and God's Word). Using our imaginations and engaging in analogical, rational thought promotes personal joy, deepens human understanding, strengthens faith, and helps us develop a Christian worldview by which we interpret the world. As we look within and all around us, we know that we are unique creatures. However, at the same time, we can easily validate that something is very wrong. The Fall completely altered God's perfect creation - and we know it.

Introduction

Our task is to discover how we can have real and sufficient communion with God through Jesus Christ in this present life and interpret the world in a way that corresponds to reality. Ethically, this means we must not only know and apply His Word (the deontological perspective) but also understand the *Situational Perspective*. The lens through which we see the world (our worldview) will determine not only how we see God but also how we interpret *all* of life, including our relationships with others, our business practices, recreation, finances, beliefs, educational philosophy, science, and politics. We have considered God's norms and standards. Today, we will examine what extra-biblical data is and consider its use in Christian ethics.



The Triangle of Necessary & Sufficient Conditions



SITUATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

EXISTENTIAL PERSPECTIVE

The Triangle of Necessary & Sufficient Conditions



SITUATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

EXISTENTIAL PERSPECTIVE

The Deontological Perspective

What "Binds" Us? What Does God Want Us To Do? What Is Our Duty?

"Scripture contains a complete transcript of God's will for ethics" (Frame).

- 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).

The Situational Perspective

- 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.
- What extra-biblical data do I need to look at in the light of the Bible?



SITUATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

EXISTENTIAL PERSPECTIVE

First: Consider God's Knowledge of the World

- God created the world. "He (Jesus) was in the world, and the world was made through him..." (Jn. 1:9). "The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man..." (Acts 17:24).
- God has infinite knowledge and understanding. He has "completely comprehensive knowledge of all reality" (Van Til). "Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure (infinite)" (Ps. 147:5). "The Lord is a God of knowledge" (I Sam. 2:3).
- God knows us exhaustively: "And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (Heb. 4:13).

God's Knowledge of the World

- God knows all of his creatures: "I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine" (Ps. 50:11).
- God knows all of our actions: "Does not he see my ways and number all my steps?" (Job 31:4). "You have kept count of my wanderings" (Ps. 56:8). "For his eyes are on the ways of man, and he sees all his steps" (Ps. 34:21). "For a man's ways are before the eyes of the Lord, and he ponders all his paths" (Prov. 5:21).
- God knows the very thoughts of each person: "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb. 4:12).

God's Omniscience



Stephen Charnock 1628-1680 English Puritan Presbyterian Clergyman "God knows what angels know, what man knows, and infinitely more; he knows himself, his own operations, all his creatures, the notions and thoughts of them; he is understanding above understanding, mind above mind, the mind of minds, the light of lights....The names of God signify a nature, viewing and piercing all things."

"Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it."

Psalm 139:6

Second: Consider Man's Knowledge of the World

Van Til on *Our Knowledge of the World*

- "Man was not created with comprehensive knowledge." Therefore, "we know the world truly though not comprehensively."
- "Man's environment precedes man. God is man's ultimate environment, and this environment is completely interpretive of man who is to know himself."
- "The whole of man's own immediate environment as well as man himself is already interpreted by God."
- "The world of objects was made in order that the subject of knowledge, namely man, **should interpret it under God**."

Van Til on *Our Knowledge of the World*

- "Without the interpretation of the universe by man to the glory of God, the whole world would be meaningless....If the Christian theory of creation by God is not true, then we hold that there cannot be objective knowledge of anything....The things of this universe must be interpreted in relation to God....God is the ultimate category of interpretation."
- "God expects human beings to interpret the world by his Word, so that all human knowledge is a knowledge of world and Word at the same time" (Frame).



J.I. Packer

"God made our life, and God alone can tell us its meaning."

Knowing God Involves Knowing the World

- "To know God obediently, we must know something about the world as well."
- "Knowing God's control over all creation means knowing His works of creation, providence, and redemption."
- "We know God by the means of the world...We cannot know anything about God without knowing something about the world at the same time."
- "God wants His people to apply His Word to their own situations, and this implies that He wants them to understand their own situations."

- John M. Frame

Principles of Knowing the World

- We need to know the world to understand the meaning of Scripture.
- Every fact tells us something about God's law.
- Facts are laws in a sense; they have normative force.
- By studying the world, we discover in more and more detail what our obligations are.
- We should be governed by the facts, to take account of what "is."
- "Knowing the world means knowing the law and vice versa. God's laws are facts, and His facts are laws. Ultimately knowing laws is the same thing as knowing facts" (Frame).

Principles of Knowing the World

- If you know the meaning of Scripture, you know how to apply it.
- We need to understand the world to understand the meaning of Scripture.
- God expects us to gain extra-biblical knowledge so we can apply it to current issues.
- "If Scripture is applied to the world, and if the world is understood in the light of Scripture, then there will be no conflict between 'facts' and 'law'" (Frame).

What Does It Mean to Think Christianly?



"Thinking Christianly is thinking by Christians about anything and everything in a consistently Christian way – in a manner that is shaped, directed, and restrained by the truth of God's Word and God's Spirit."

- Os Guinness, Fit Bodies, Fat Minds

Strive to Think Analogically

"By this is meant that God is the original and that man is the derivative. God has absolute self-contained system within himself....Man must, to be sure, think God's thoughts after him; but this means that he must, in seeking to form his own system, constantly be subject to the authority of God's system to the *extent* that this is revealed to him" (Cornelius van Til). R.C. Sproul explains that analogical knowledge implies true but limited knowledge and takes into account the Creator's infinity and human finitude.



Cornelius Van Til 1895-1987 Dutch-American Christian Philosopher and Reformed Theologian

Exercise: Should President Trump Be Removed From Office?

DEONTOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

What does the whole Bible say about removing Donald J. Trump from office?

