AN INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIAN ETHICS

Introduction

Last week we continued in our quest for a clearer understanding of what it means to live *coram Deo* (before the face of God) so that we may do His will, please Him in every respect, and glorify His name in all things. I trust that the imagery of entering the world of ethics through a portal (e.g., Lucy entering into Narnia through the Wardrobe) awakened in you a desire to use your imagination, mind, heart, and emotions in the pursuit of Christ and all that pertains to His kingdom. As Lucy's eyes opened wide to absorb the beautiful landscape in snowcovered Narnia as soon as she passed through the Wardrobe, so it is my prayer that this introduction to Christian ethics will bring much delight and wonder to as you ponder the riches of His Word and world.

THE PARTY OF THE PARTY OF THE PARTY OF THE A FAMILY AND A DATA AND The Wardrobe: Lucy's Portal into Narnia

Introduction

Our journey today takes us further into "Narnia" along the path of the Situational Perspective. Having recognized that we are true imagebearers of God and are endowed with special gifts and abilities with which to relate to God and the world, we affirm that 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). It bears repeating that 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....and live in it. In order to begin well, then, let's take a few minutes to review our last lecture.

Review of Last Week

- God's knowledge of the world is exhaustive (His omniscience).
- Human knowledge of the world is derivative and limited.
- God has already interpreted the world.
- The world of facts and objects should be interpreted under God.
- Humans must interpret God's Word and His world under His Lordship.
- We know God by the means of the Word and world.
- Each person must understand his/her own situation accurately.
- Knowing the world helps us understand the Word and vice versa.
- Every fact tells us something about God and God's law.

Review of Last Week

- Facts are laws in a sense; they have normative force.
- By studying the world, we discover in more and more detail what our obligations before God 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).
- God expects us to gain extra-biblical knowledge so we can apply it to current issues and the situations in which we find ourselves.



The Triangle of Necessary & Sufficient Conditions



SITUATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

EXISTENTIAL PERSPECTIVE

The Situational Perspective



"The focus is on the **world**, on the course of **nature** and **history** as the environment in which we make ethical decisions. It is focused less on the Bible than on **extrabiblical data** of importance to ethics" (John Frame).

SITUATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

The Situational Perspective DEONTOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE How can we change the world in order to bring glory to God? God's Control

SITUATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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EXISTENTIAL PERSPECTIVE

"Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (I Cor. 10:31).

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?

Gathering Information Before Making Decisions

"For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost, to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and take counsel whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks terms of peace" (Lk. 14:28-32).

Seeking Facts

"Many decisions about medical care, colleges, job offers, marriage partners, ministry opportunities, political positions, and numerous other things require us to find more information about the actual facts of a situation before we are able to make a responsible choice."



Wayne Grudem, PhD Professor of Theology and Biblical Studies Phoenix Seminary 1948

Moral Syllogisms

The *Situational Perspective* provides many of the minor premises of moral syllogisms. Moral syllogisms include at least one **normative** premise, one **situational** premise, and a **conclusion** that is an applied norm.

- 1. Lying is morally wrong (normative premise)
- 2. Bill's statement was a lie (situational perspective)
- 3. Therefore, Bill's statement was morally wrong (existential conclusion)

What Is A Fact?

- Fact, n., "a thing that has actually happened or is true; a thing that has been or is; reality; truth; actuality; the state of things as they are" (OED).
- "Facts are states of affairs. Statements of fact (propositions) claim to assert what is the case....If a moral principle (e.g., "Stealing is wrong") is true, then it is a fact."
- Illustration: "Chair designates a thing. The chair is blue asserts a state of affairs."
- "To make a statement of fact is to offer an interpretation of reality. There is no significant difference between a statement of fact and an interpretation of reality."

Those Who Understood Facts

- "Let us take things as we find them: let us not attempt to distort them into what they are not. True philosophy deals with facts. We cannot make facts. All our wishing cannot change them. We must use them" (John Henry Cardinal Newman).
- "Beware that you do not lose the substance by grasping at the shadow" (Aesop).
- "We must always think about things, and we must think about things as they are, not as they are said to be" (George Bernard Shaw).
- "Let us try to see things as they are, and not wish to be wiser than God" (Gustave Flaubert).

Facts and Scripture

"The God of which the Scriptures speak is the God who makes the facts to be what they are. There can therefore be no fact which is ultimately out of accord with the system of truth set forth in Scripture. Every fact in the universe is what it is just because of the place that it has in this system" (Van Til).



How Do You Know A Frog?



Do you understand a frog more on a biological dissecting table or in its natural habitat?

Application: Acts 1:8

"You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

To use the **law**, some knowledge of the **world** is necessary:

- 1. Who is the "you" Jesus is talking to?
- 2. What is power? How do we receive it?
- 3. Who is the Holy Spirit? How does He come upon us?
- 4. What is a witness? How do I become one?
- 5. Where is Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria?
- 6. Where is the remotest part of the earth?

God Knows Our Hearts

"We may make decisions that we regret later on, because we hadn't at first considered all the relevant principles and facts. But God understands. In such situations, it is helpful to remember that we are justified by faith, not by works – nor, therefore, by ethical accuracy. That comfort does not, of course, excuse us from hard thinking. If God has justified us, we will want to please Him, and we will make intellectual and other efforts to do what he wants. But the sincerity of such efforts is not measured by the perfection of the results. We may try very hard to apply biblical principles, and still come up with an answer that later proves inadequate. Yet God will honor our attempt. He knows the heart, and he takes into consideration the obstacles that we must overcome" (Frame).

What Are Facts?



"Facts are totally unforgiving. Facts are what we run into when we are wrong."

- Dallas Willard

Dallas Willard, PhD 1935-2013