Various Ethical Models
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What is Ethics? On a web site called "Ethics Connection" there is a paper with that exact question as its title. It cites a sociologist, Raymond Baumhart asking business people, "What does ethics mean to you?" Following are some of the replies that he received.

"Ethics has to do with what my feelings tell me is right or wrong."

"Ethics has to do with my religious beliefs."

"Being ethical is doing what the law requires."

"Ethics consists of the standards of behavior our society accepts."

"I don't know what the word means."

Among my brethren it would not be surprising to find answers similar to the ones above. The last one perhaps being given in reply more often than not.

Ethics simply has to do with "How am I going to act?" It deals with the question of what is the right or wrong thing to do in a given situation. Eve was confronted with an ethical dilemma when confronted by Satan in the garden of Eden. To eat the fruit or to not eat the fruit. On the one hand there were obvious (so she thought) benefits to be had by eating it, on the other hand God had told her and Adam not to eat of that tree. God had told them that they would die the day they ate of it. Satan told her that she would not die. What to do?

The Christian faces ethical questions every day of his/her life. Very often we think of ethical questions in view of the major questions that we may deal with such as the topics dealt within this lecture, abortion, cloning, warfare, euthanasia, and so forth. Ethics however are even more fundamental than that. "Do I lie to my best friend to make her feel good?" "Do I speed so I won't be late to church?" "Do I take this ream of paper home from the workplace without checking with someone?" "Do I copy this computer program for my best friend?" These things all have to do with deciding what is the right thing to do.

To get a bit more basic though it might be said also that ethics is the study of how to make those choices. In other words the choices are ethical in nature, but the means, views, concepts that we develop and bring into play in making those decisions is what ethics is all about.

"Do I do this because it makes ME feel good?" "Do I do this because it is the loving thing to do?" "Do I do this because this is what I feel is the right thing to do?" "Do I do this, but it doesn't really matter what I do anyway?" "Do I do this because this is going to accomplish what I want?" The questions can go on, but these are the questions that we ask ourselves as we decide why we are go to make a choice and they will then determine HOW we will make that choice.

Ethics for an individual boils down to this. It is the view that you have of the world (your world view), which is what will influence the decisions that you make as you face moral choices throughout your life.

As already noted, man has been faced with ethical choices and the decision of how to make those choices since the Garden of Eden. Men through the ages since then have struggled, though often unnecessarily, with how they should respond to ethical/moral dilemmas.

It is a bit difficult deciding where to start, where to go, and the direction to take in getting there in a discussion concerning various world views or ethical models without turning a short essay into a multi volume book. There is much that is interesting as to the course man has taken over the years to develop ethical views. However there is neither time nor space to go into all that could be discussed.

A person is going to hold one of two views. Whichever view they hold will be the criterion by which he or she will determine their ethical outlook to make moral decisions.
One will believe that there is either an objective standard of moral or they will decide that morality is subjective in nature.

The belief that morality or right and wrong is objective is simply to believe that there is a standard which will determine right and wrong and that the standard is just exactly that. Standard. In other words it is believed that whatever is right will be right in every situation and circumstance and that what is wrong will be wrong in every situation and circumstance. That standard is able to guide one in all the ethical/moral decisions that they may have to make. Once a person has determined that morality is objective, they will then have to determine just what that standard is. If one claims to be a Christian then they should/would believe in an objective standard of morality and would/should have come to an understanding that the standard is the word of God. (2 Peter 1:3; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). This will be discussed later in the lesson.

The opposite side of that coin, the idea that morality is subjective, is of course exactly the opposite. It is the idea that there is no standard for morality. In fact it may be subject to any number of things. Morality may be determined simply by how a person feels, how a group of people feel, by what makes one or many feel good, by the situation, the place, the time and on and on.

Most, if not all, of the ethical models that men have developed stem from the second belief. There is no objective standard and morality must be subjective. This is interesting since each of these models in some way deny a standard, yet by their very development promote a standard themselves which must be adhered to if one is going to follow that model. Rather interesting.

In the book *Introduction to Philosophy*, written by Norman L. Geisler and Paul D. Feinberg, the authors list what they entitle "Different Theories of the Meaning of Right." They say;

> "A brief survey of the way various philosophers have conceived of the right will set the stage of the discussion of right and wrong." (353)

Part of that list with a brief explanation follows;

Might is Right	This is what is known in the business management world as the "bull in the woods" theory. The strongest man was the foreman as long as he was able to hold that position by means of physical strength. It is the view that right is determined by the one strong enough to impose their will upon others. (A dictatorship)
Morals are Mores	This as the authors state "implies a cultural relativity of morality." (354) It is ok, because that is the culture. An example that comes to mind is the justification of nudity in certain cultures because that's the way they do it there.
Man is the Measure	The individual determines what is right or wrong. What may be right for me may be wrong for you.
The Race is Right	Very similar to "morals are mores, it is the idea that "the human race is the court of appeals." (355)
Right is Moderation	Stay away from extremes. "The middle of the road." Philosophy. Unfortunately could also be known as "Straddling the fence."
There is no Right	There is nothing that is either right or wrong. Everything is based upon feelings and emotions. There is no more strength to the statement "Terrorists should not kill innocent people.", than there is in the statement "You should not drink carbonated beverages."
Right is What Brings Pleasure	This is the "if it feels good, do it" philosophy. Became very popular in the 1960's in the United States. Was also advocated strongly by Anton LeVay in his book *The Satanic Bible.*
Right is the greatest good for the race	The greatest good for the greatest number of the people. Often the philosophy claimed to be held by politicians.
Good is what is desired for its own sake.	Good is defined as that which is pleasurable. It is the end to the means.
Good is undefinable	Intuition ethics. It cannot be determined just what is good, only when confronted with a situation a person will have "intuitions" of what is the right thing to do. Even then it can't be determined why it was right or another action was wrong.
Good is what God Wills	The belief that there is an objective standard of morality that is determined by a superior being (God) to man who has conveyed to mankind what that standard is. (Jer. 10:23).

Geisler and Feinberg's list I believe give some general theories that are found in several "models" that man has developed. In the following list are some models that incorporate the theories mentioned by those two authors. Again there will be included in the list a brief overview of the model, it's basic tenets and its faults. I have tried to select from among the many models that have been developed those views with which a person may most find themselves confronted with today. Most of the following information comes from a web site http://www.xrefer.com.

RATIONALISM - The extreme rationalist tries to base all knowledge on reason alone. This is the exact opposite of empiricism. Frederic W. Bave in his book *The Spiritual Society: What Lurks Beyond Postmodernism*, quoting A. E. Houseman writes;

> "Man occupied himself by choice with thoughts which do not range beyond the sphere of his own understanding. Rationalism was almost deified." (126)

The problem with such a philosophy in determining right or wrong is, 1. Since God cannot be "experienced" He and His ideals would be beyond reason as man understood it. 2. Man in his deceit tends to "reason" away God and His will. (Romans 1:18). It is rationalism that explains away the miracles of the Bible and ultimately reasons away the supernatural i.e. God.

UTILITARIANISM - This is the same as Geisler's "right is the greatest good for the race." In other words, morality is that which "the greatest happiness of the greatest number."[1] Notice however that this is not the greatest good, but the greatest happiness. There is a great difference. Even if one person, or even a group of persons could determine what the "greatest good" is for everyone else (with no standard to follow how could they ever come to an agreement) this is not the issue. It is far easier, at least seemingly so, to determine what brings the masses the greatest happiness.

Besides the fact that happiness does not necessarily equate to being moral, it is often the case that the masses actually turn out to be the vocal minority that clamor loudly enough to have those making the decisions rule the way they want.

We see this philosophy and this practice in American politics all the time. The American movie industry also lays claim to this philosophy as they disseminate their filth to the American public with the claim, "that is what the people want to see."

One major problem with such a view is that the majority is seldom, if ever, right. Isn't that what Jesus taught in Matthew 7:13-14?

CONSEQUENTIALISM - Is a fancy way of saying that the ends justify the means. It doesn't matter what you do as long as you get the result that you are looking for. You will see from the example that I will give that there are crossovers in many of these models. If your children are hungry, then stealing

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is acceptable, because the only thing that matters is that they are fed and taken care of. (You will see the crossover as we discuss situation ethics).

This simply denies that there is any wrong just as long as good has resulted from it. Again the major problem is that there is a denial of any standard of morality that would dictate right or wrong. You may consider this ok unless you are the one that has been stolen from. Then it is not perhaps so moral.

PRAGMATISM - Very closely related to the previous view, pragmatism is the view that whatever it takes to accomplish one's goal is right. This is seen in business often as companies continue to sell that which is hazardous to the public, a safety hazard, dangerous even though they are aware of the dangers because it would be too costly to make changes to the product or to recall it from the market. It is "right" to go ahead and market the product, because in business the bottom line is the one at the bottom of the financial sheet. If it makes a profit then it is right to market it.

The problem with pragmatism is that it only looks at end results, it doesn't consider the needs of others, and ultimately it becomes amoral, (without morals).

RELATIVISM - Everything is relative to the group, situation, place, time etc., to which it may be happening. It is much like the "morals are mores" in the above list. It again denies that there is any absolute standard of right or wrong, but whatever may be ascertained by that particular group or society as right or wrong. Of course with so many different societies, groups, peoples in the world then there is no way to determine what is right or wrong. It is totally up to the whim of any given group.

SITUATION ETHICS - In 1966 Joseph Fletcher wrote his (now infamous to some) book *Situation Ethics*, in which he developed his ethical model which has come to be known by the name of his book.

This philosophy teaches that the individual and the situation will cause a determination of what is the right thing to do. There is not an overriding right or wrong, but each situation contains within it the capability of being an exception to the rule, (which doesn't actually exist). The only overriding rule that must be applied is love. In other words, what is the "loving thing to do." This however is not really a law, but only a motive. In other words it is merely a justification for one's actions.

At http://www.faithnet.freeserve.co.uk/situation_ethics.htm, there is an article entitled *Situation Ethics/Proportionalism*. The author is not identified, but there are two paragraphs the give the basic tenets of situation ethics in the form of four working and six fundamental principles that I believe are worthy of looking at.

"**Four working principles:** 1) The practical course of an action is motivated by love; 2) The necessity to always respond in love to each situation; 3) The necessity to accept the premise of acting in love by faith rather than by reason; 4) The desire to put people, not laws, first.

Six fundamental principles: 1) No actions are intrinsically right or wrong. Nothing is good in and of itself except for love. Actions are good if they help people and bad if they don't. One cannot expect to live responsibly with moral absolutes; 2) Good actions should not be done for reward (E.g. experiencing a good feeling or seeking altruistic deeds in return) but should be done for their own sake. Jesus and Paul taught love as the highest principle above the Law; 3) Justice is love at work in the community; 4) Love is practical and not selective. We should show love to all, even our enemies. Christian love is unconditional; 5) Love is the end - never a means to something else; 6) Humans have the responsibility of freedom. They are not bound by any Law. With this comes the responsibility to 'do the most loving thing' in *every* situation."

The author continues as he quotes another work;

> *"Fletcher claims that it is a mistake to generalise. (sic) You can't say 'Is it ever right to lie to your family?' The answer must be, 'I don't know, give me an example.' A concrete situation is needed, not a generalisation. ([sic]* ***'It all depends'*** *may well be the watchword of the Situationist. (Vardy & Grosch p.130)"*

We once again see the denial of an objective standard of morality in favor of letting the "loving thing" be the guideline for what is right. What however is the loving thing. Who will determine that? How will it be determined? As you can see, it all boils down to subjectivism. The person will end up doing what "they" THINK is the "right and loving thing to do."

HUMANISM - *This view determines that man is the ultimate being and is the decider of what is right for him. Humanism says the following about itself in the Humanist Manifesto I,*

> *"ELEVENTH: Man will learn to face the crises of life in terms of his knowledge of their naturalness and probability. Reasonable and manly attitudes will be fostered by education and supported by custom. We assume that humanism will take the path of social and mental hygiene and discourage sentimental and unreal hopes and wishful thinking."*

In 1973, forty years after the first manifesto, the second appeared entitled simply Humanist Manifesto II. In it are presented the following tenets;

> *"Traditional moral codes and newer irrational cults both fail to meet the pressing needs of today and tomorrow. False "theologies of hope" and messianic ideologies, substituting new dogmas for old, cannot cope with existing world realities. They separate rather than unite peoples."*

> *"Humanity, to survive, requires bold and daring measures. We need to extend the uses of scientific method, not renounce them, to fuse reason with compassion in order to build constructive social and moral values. Confronted by many possible futures, we must decide which to pursue. The ultimate goal should be the fulfillment of the potential for*

growth in each human personality -- not for the favored few, but for all of humankind. Only a shared world and global measures will suffice."

"But we can discover no divine purpose or providence for the human species. While there is much that we do not know, humans are responsible for what we are or will become. No deity will save us; we must save ourselves."

And finally,

THIRD: 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 need and interest. To deny this distorts the whole basis of life. Human life has meaning because we create and develop our futures. Happiness and the creative realization of human needs and desires, individually and in shared enjoyment, are continuous themes of humanism. We strive for the good life, here and now. The goal is to pursue life's enrichment despite debasing forces of vulgarization, commercialization, and dehumanization."

In other words, what I need, or think that I need, will determine what is right or wrong. The goal is the good life here and now. The ideal of humanism is that man is his own god and thus can determine his own morality.

Humanism declares the same lie that Satan declared to Eve in the garden. "Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." (Genesis 3:5).

Obviously none of the above are models or views that the Christian can use as they make their decisions from day to day. What ethic then should we follow?

Perry C. Cotham edited a book in 1979 entitled, Christian Social Ethics. Chapter three is an article by James W. Thompson. He states the following,

"When we turn to the New Testament, we discover that it is no easy task to derive an ethic from Jesus and the early church. Indeed, the very word "ethics" is the legacy of the Greek philosophers, for whom ethics was the rational obligations and concepts of right and wrong. Thus if we are to follow the traditional definitions of ethics as "the systematic account of our judgements of right and wrong," we will find that the New Testament is not primarily a book about ethics." (45-46)

That is not to say however that the Bible is void in this area or that it does not provide us with the tools that we need to make ethical decisions for it does.

(2 Peter 1:3 KJV) "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue:"
(2 Timothy 3:16-17 KJV) "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: {17} That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

If these passages are true, and they are, then we can find in the scriptures all that is needed for us to make an informed ethical decision regardless of where medical technology takes us, in spite of what new thing may come along that requires us to make difficult choices in this life.

Many have been the authors that I have looked at in the preparation of this material that has indicated that ethical choices are harder today than they have ever been. However we need to realize that the issues of abortion, euthanasia, suicide and related topics have nearly always been with man. Does God provide us with sufficient information as to how we deal with them and make decisions concerning them? Indeed he does.

Other things that we may have to make decisions about that are there because of technology are such things as in vitro fertilization, cloning, stem cell research. Are these new though? Indeed the things man is doing may be new, but if we get right down to the basics of each of these things and learn what is on the dark side so to speak of the bright picture our scientist paint for us, are they not just the same old issues dressed in new clothes? Therefore if the Bible was relevant to the first century with its problem, then it is also relevant today, the problems have simply taken on a new face.

It is interesting that Jesus said, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." (Matthew 5:6 KJV). Righteousness of course has to do with being right. If Jesus told us that seeking righteousness would make us happy or blessed then He surely did not leave us bereft of the means and knowledge of how to seek it. In fact, in the very lesson that He made that statement, the sermon on the mount (Matthew 5-7), He gives what should become the basis of the Christian's lifestyle and the foundation for his ethical decision making.

The beatitudes, blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are they that mourn, blessed are the meek, blessed are the merciful, blessed are the pure in heart, and blessed are the peacemakers.

As he continues with His lesson he teaches us that we are to be a light (of righteousness) to the community through our good works, that we should not speak rashly against another in anger - to do so is parallel with murder, settle our differences, do not look at the opposite sex lustfully, divorce for fornication only, go the extra mile, love your enemy, forgive those that trespass against you amongst others that perhaps could be listed.

Paul taught that Christian ethics were different from the world,

"Knowye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, {10} Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. {11} And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Corinthians 6:9-11 KJV).

James taught that one could not "hold hands" with the world,

"Ye adulterers and adulteresses, knowye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." (James 4:4 KJV),

Then John pointed out that we must not love the world,

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. {16} For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. {17} And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." (1 John 2:15-17 KJV).

The Bible addresses ethics in such places as Galatians 5:19-21,

"Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, {20} Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, {21} Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.",

Colossians 3:1-10, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. {2} Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. {3} For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. {4} When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. {5} Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: {6} For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: {7} In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them. {8} But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. {9} Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; {10} And have put on the newman, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him:", and Rev. 21:8, "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers,

and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death."

It also deals with ethics in such places as, Philippians 4:8,

"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

2 Peter 1:5-8 KJV "And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; {6} And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; {7} And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. {8} For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.",

and Galatians 5:22-23, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, {23} Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law."

How do we apply the things we read in the Bible to our decision making or how do we make ethical decisions as a Christian? Following are some questions, I do not know their original source, but if we ask ourselves these questions then they should be helpful to us in making good righteous ethical decisions.

1. ***Am I commanded not to do it?*** *(James 4:17 KJV) "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."*
2. ***Can I do it for the glory of God?*** *(1 Corinthians 10:31 KJV) "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.", (1 Cor 6:19 KJV) "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?"*
3. ***Can I do it in the name of the Lord?*** *(Colossians 3:17 KJV) "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him."*
4. ***Is it of the world?*** *1 John 2:15-17*
5. ***Would Jesus do it?*** *(1 Peter 2:21 KJV) "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:" (There is nothing wrong in asking "What would Jesus do?", it just should not be a religious fad as it became in the United States and elsewhere a few years ago).*
6. ***Does it have the appearance of evil?*** *(1 Thessalonians 5:22 KJV) "Abstain from all appearance of evil."*

7. ***Is it a weight?*** *(Hebrews 12:1 KJV) "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,"*

8. ***Can I do it when I remember that God, Christ, the Holy Spirit and the Word dwell in me?*** *2 Corinthians 6:16, Ephesians 3:17, Romans 8:9, Colossians 3:16.*

9. ***Is it an example of a believer?*** *(1 Timothy 4:12 KJV) "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity."*

10. ***Is it a stumbling block?*** *(1 Corinthians 8:9 KJV) "But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak." Romans 14:13, 21*

11. ***Would you want your children to do it?*** *(Ephesians 6:4 KJV) "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." (Proverbs 22:6 KJV) "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it."*

12. ***When Jesus returns would you want to be found doing it — or wearing it?*** *(1 John 2:28 KJV) "And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming."*

13. ***Is there any doubt in your mind?*** *(Romans 14:23 KJV) "And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin."*

14. ***Will it make me a better Christian?*** *2 Peter 1:5-8.*

15. ***Will it bring pleasure to God?*** *(Revelation 4:11 KJV) "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."*

16. ***Will it help lead others to Christ?*** *Mark 16:15-16, Matthew 28:19-20*

Man will always have ethical questions to answer. As long as he does Satan will devise lies for him to believe leading him to deal with those ethical issues with unrighteous responses and ideologies.

The man of God however has been prepared if he or she will simply use the tools that God as provided to us in order that we may deal with these questions righteously.
Let us close with the words of the prophet Micah.

*(Micah 6:6-9 KJV) "Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? {7} Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? {8} **He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?** {9} The LORD'S voice crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see thy name: hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it."*

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