



Christian People Ethical Living Under God's Law

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Introduction

We live in an age in which people are greatly concerned about ethics. Every day, the news media bring to mind issues of war and peace, preserving the environment, the powers of government, abortion and euthanasia, genetic research, and so on. Many people seem very sure of the answers to these ethical questions [1]. But when you probe deeply into their positions, they admit that their conviction is based on nothing more than partisan consensus or individual feeling. But the Bible does give us a basis for ethical judgments: the revelation of the living God. So ethical discussions open a wide door for Christian witness [2]. People are far more open to discuss ethics than to discuss theistic proofs, or even transcendental arguments. Philosophy does not excite many people today, and many are not even open to the simple witness of personal testimony and the simple gospel [3]. But they do care about right and wrong. Christians who can talk about ethics in a cogent way, therefore, have a great apologetic and evangelistic advantage. It is true that many do not want to hear this witness today. They consider Christianity a religious position and therefore one that should not be discussed in the public square [4]. But this view is utterly unreasonable, and that un-reasonability should be pressed. Why should religious positions be excluded from the debate, especially when secular positions have been so helpless in presenting a convincing basis for ethical judgments? As I shall indicate in this volume, the main currents of twentieth and twenty-first century thought has become bankrupt, confessedly unable to provide any basis for distinguishing right from wrong [5]. I believe that, despite the political incorrectness of the suggestion, many are hungering for answers and are willing to look even at religious positions to find them. And I shall argue as well that all ethics is religious, even that ethics that tries hardest to be secular. In the end, all ethics presupposes ultimate values [6]. It requires allegiance to someone or something that demands all devotion and governs all thinking. That kind of allegiance is indistinguishable from religious devotion, even if it doesn't require liturgical practices. So the line between religious and secular ethics is a fuzzy one, and it is arbitrary to use such a line to determine who is entitled to join an ethical dialogue. But more important than the ability to talk about ethics is the ability to live it. This is true even in our witness to the world [7]. People see how we live. Even Christians who are not articulate or eloquent can make, through their actions, a great impact on others. Jesus comments on the importance of our works to our witness, when he says, "let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven". There are those who enter the field of ethics with a goal of dispelling legalism. So as ethicists they want to emphasize our freedom. Often that means taking the liberal side in ethical controversies. Others enter the field disgusted by the moral decline in our society [8]. These may also be impressed by the rigorousness of Scripture, the high cost of discipleship. They want to teach an ethic that does not compromise with worldliness, a radical ethic of discipline and self-control [9]. I trust God's Spirit to help us thread these needles, to help us find the biblical path, even when it is narrow and relatively untraveled [10].

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Conflict of Interest

None

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