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## BIBLICAL TRAINING CENTER

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February 11, 2018

### Understanding Morality

Shawn Nelson

#### What is Morality?

- When we say, "Humans are moral beings," what do we really mean?
  - It means that people are able to make choices.
  - To understand this, compare humans with other life forms:
    - Spiders (always spin the same web)
    - Dogs (can't help being dogs!)
  - In contrast, people are in the "image of God."

Genesis 1:27: "So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."

- Part of being created in God's image means free will. Free will = the ability to "do otherwise." People can do the right thing –or– wrong thing.

Examples of right things:

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Examples of wrong things:

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#### Who decides what's Right/Wrong?

Imagine you could live on a large island where people could do ANYTHING they wanted to. You could rob banks, loot stores, lie in court, cheat on tests, sleep with whomever you want... What do you think would happen? Would people be happy?

Moral laws come from God.

- God is an absolute moral lawgiver

- Moral laws exude from His unchanging nature
- These laws are traced to His moral attributes (truthfulness, love/omnibenevolence, mercy)
- Morality is prescribed through special revelation (Bible).
- Moral laws are understood intuitively through general revelation.  
We know right from wrong by our own reaction when wrong is done to us, and we intuitively know we should not treat people this way (Rom. 2:14-15).

## Why should we care about what's "Right"?

Objection: Nobody is righteous! We're saved by faith in Christ. Why have a class on morality!?

Response: It's true we are "declared righteous" through faith in Jesus Christ...

Romans 3:10,11—"There is none righteous, no, not one; They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one."

Philippians 3:8-9—(I count my works) "as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith."

By NT times, "righteousness" began to mean "salvation." This salvation carries the idea of becoming righteous through faith in Jesus. (Greek: δικαιοσύνη dikaiosynē)

...But it's also true we are in the process of "being made righteous" through sanctification.

1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 "For this is the will of God, your sanctification [being made holy]..."

1 Peter 2:24— We should "die to sin and live to righteousness."

This means Christians should care about what is right!

## Different views of Morality

Download detail sheet at: [callup.org/morality](http://callup.org/morality)

### Two views that are not fitting for Christians:

1. **Antinomianism:** There are no laws of any kind (not acceptable because based on atheism, relativism, anti-Christian worldview).
2. **Utilitarianism/Generalism:** People create general laws based on what brings most good for society (also based on relativism, anti-Christian worldview).

## Christians views over the years:

3. **Situationism:** There's only one absolute law: love. The right thing is to do the loving thing in every situation. Problem is won't know what to do beforehand; reduces to #1 or #2 above.
4. **Unqualified Absolutism:** We must follow all God-given moral laws no matter what. Regarding conflicts? They are tests: God will lead us out if we're faithful.
5. **Conflicting Absolutism:** We must follow all God-given moral laws (like previous). But moral dilemmas are real. Sometimes we must break a moral law to do what's right, but there's forgiveness in Jesus. ("Lesser Evil" view).
6. **Graded Absolutism:** There are higher and lower moral laws. When we follow the higher we're not culpable for breaking the lower ("Greater Good" view).

## What are Moral Dilemmas?

When we talk about, "Moral Dilemmas," what do we mean?

- **Rahab** lied about the spies to her king to cooperate with God's plan (Joshua 2:4). Result: In Hall of Faith (Hebrews 11:31).
- The **Hebrew midwives** did not carry out Pharaoh's order to kill the male children, and later lied about it (Exodus 1:15-21). Result: God blessed them (Ex. 1:21).
- Abraham told **Sarah** to go along with his lie to Pharaoh (Gen. 12:10-20; again in 20:1-18). Result: she submitted and is model of godly submission (1 Peter 3:6).
- The **three Hebrew youths** refusing to bow down to the idol at command of the king (Daniel 3).
- **Daniel** refusing order of the king to stop praying (Daniel 6).
- **The apostles** continuing to evangelize after the city officials ordered them not to (Acts 4).

## Some Moral Dilemmas Today

- Your company sends you to a trade show to obtain products from a competitor suspected of breaking your company's patents. The problem is you would need to lie about who you work for.
- A couple finds out at eight months that their baby has anencephaly (cerebral cortex has not developed at). Their child will be in a permanent vegetative state and will not live

longer than a few months once born. The doctor recommends ending the pregnancy ASAP.

- A man rapes an underage schizophrenic teen who becomes pregnant. The father is wondering if an abortion is the best option.
- It's WW2 and you're Corrie ten Boom. The Nazi Germans knock on your door and ask you if you're hiding Jews in your home (and you are). What do you say?

Next week we will look at how to practically make tough ethical decisions like these.

## Glossary of Important Terms

**Absolutism:** There are absolute moral laws.

**Antinomianism:** There are no ethical rules or norms.

**Deontological Ethics:** Duty-centered ethics stressing obedience to rules, as opposed to result-centered or utilitarian ethics (see Teleological Ethics).

**Essentialism:** An ethical law is willed by God because it is good; it is not good because it is willed by God, as in voluntarism.

**Ethics:** The branch of philosophy that deals with what is right and what is wrong.

**Generalism:** There are no universal ethical norms, only general ones that admit of exceptions.

**Graded Absolutism:** When two or more universal ethical norms come into unavoidable conflict, our nonculpable duty is to follow the higher one.

**Hierarchicalism:** Another term for graded absolutism.

**Intentionalism:** The intent is the essence of an act, so that it is right if it is done with good intentions and wrong if it is done with bad intentions.

**Principle of Double-effect:** An act is good, even though it may also have an evil result, provided that one wills the good result.

**Quantitative Utilitarianism:** Utilitarian view that defines the greatest good in a *quantitative* way, measuring how much pleasure over how much pain is likely to result.

**Qualitative Utilitarianism:** Utilitarian view that measures the greatest good in terms of what kind or *quality* of pleasure over pain is likely to results.

**Situationism:** There are no absolute ethical laws; all decisions are based on changing situations.

**Teleological Ethics:** Ethical decision made in view of the end (*telos*) or results, as opposed to Deontological ethics.

**Unqualified Absolutism:** There are many moral absolutes that never actually conflict; all alleged conflicts are only apparent, not real.

**Utilitarianism:** The right action is what brings the greatest good to the greatest number in the long run.

**Voluntarism:** Something is good because God wills it, as opposed to essentialism which holds that God wills it because it is good.

## Bibliography

Rae, Scott B. *Moral Choices: An Introduction to Ethics*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009.

Rae, Scott. *Introducing Christian Ethics: a Short Guide to Making Moral Choices*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016.

Geisler, Norman L. *Christian Ethics: Contemporary Issues and Options*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010.

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## Class Schedule

### Guidance on Making Moral Choices

**DONE**     Understanding Morality  
Feb. 18:    Making Ethical Decisions  
Feb. 25:    Abortion  
Mar. 4:     Genetics and Biotechnology  
Mar. 11:    War and Morality  
Mar. 18:    Sexual Ethics

*If you know somebody who would be blessed by this class, feel free to invite them; visitors welcome at any time!*

Where: Sundays second service (10:45AM) in the upstairs chapel building room C-205B