

Introduction to Christian Ethics

Foundations

Introduction

What beliefs and actions are good and evil, right and wrong, and how are we to decide? Is something good because it brings happiness or pleasure, or is there a more objective and universally applicable way of making moral judgments? Is there a way for the Christian to approach most, if not every, moral issue, or must we rely on a synthesis of secular ethics, Biblical proof-texts and personal intuition? These are not academic questions. We are enmeshed in a fast-changing, pluralistic culture that seems to be moving ever further away from its Judeo-Christian foundations. Consequently, we are facing significant personal, social and political challenges to once-accepted norms, values (such as the sanctity of life), beliefs and institutions (such as marriage and family) that Christians believe help safeguard our very existence as a human society.

In this chapter we will define our terms and seek to give a Biblical framework or template to help us with the ongoing task of thinking ethically. While the rest of this unit will seek to address contemporary ethical issues, it can only do so in an introductory way. It is important to have a Christian ethic that enables us to think about these and other moral issues ourselves. After all, as Christians we have God's word, God's Spirit, and one another, in order to rightly interpret and apply God's word to moral issues.



Further, we must seek a Christian ethic that is grounded in a Biblical or Christian worldview; that is, we must read our Bible and think ethically in accord with the overarching message of the Bible, with how that message is developed, and with respect to where we, the 21st century people of God, are located within God's salvation history. This framework will speak directly to moral issues, such as human sexuality, and provide us with invaluable signposts for issues that the Bible does not speak directly to, such as euthanasia.

Definitions

What follow are working definitions rather than watertight ones. They are guides in our construction of a Christian ethic and in thinking about morality.

Ethics

The study and analysis of morality, of alternative views of right and wrong, and of ways to determine moral knowledge and actions.

Ethic

A system or theory of underlying principles that determines the good and the right. It is possible to have a morality without an ethic; that is, to hold to a moral code or moral behaviour without a coherent ethical foundation or principles that generate the morality.

Morality

A moral code of beliefs, values and actions.

Some reasons for having an ethic

1. In Western culture our traditional morality is gradually disappearing and being challenged by rival moral systems. An ethic allows us to question and evaluate these as well as our own morality.
2. Modern technology and morality are producing new situations that traditional and even Biblical rules do not envisage or cover. An ethic can provide consistent principles and patterns that help us determine the good, the bad and the ugly in modern scenarios.
3. An ethic helps us to be consistent with our morality and moral choices, instead of selective and prejudiced.



Toward a Christian ethic

A Christian ethic will be founded on our knowledge of God revealed in the Bible. For there God reveals his character and purposes, inviting us to know him and his will (Ps 119; Isa 55:1-13). For our purposes, that knowledge reveals:

1. God as Creator and Redeemer, forming the basis for **moral obligation**
2. The moral law of God that reflects and expresses the moral character of God. Under the Old Covenant that law is summarised in the Ten Commandments and under the New Covenant these in turn are summarised as **love for God and love for neighbour**
3. **God's purposes for his creation**, our rejection of those purposes and God's restoration of his purposes for humanity and the world in Christ

The rest of this chapter will enlarge on each of these elements and propose that each one is needed in constructing a Christian ethic.

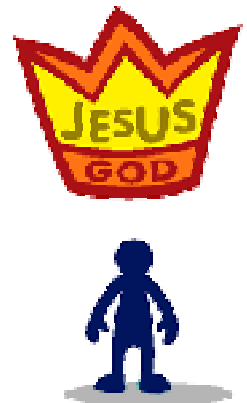
1. God *is*...therefore we *ought*



This first point is foundational of the rest. Ultimate reality is God, and God has revealed that he alone is God (Isa 44:6-8; Jas 2:19), one God eternally existing in three persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matt 28:19; Jn 1:1-14; 15:26). God created time, space and matter, bringing everything into existence from nothing (Gen 1; Heb 11:3). Therefore everything is not only dependant upon God but exists for his pleasure and glory (Rom 11:34-36; 1 Jn 3:22). God uniquely created humanity in his image and likeness, to represent God in the world and to rule the world under God (Gen 1:26-30; Ps 8).

Therefore Man is not an autonomous, free agent, but a morally responsible and divinely accountable creature (Ezek 18:1-32; Rom 1:32; 2:6-11). If we are self-existing, free agents, then moral obligation is subjectively imposed by ourselves or other humans. Absolute human freedom or autonomy is an ethic that underlies harmful practices such as abortion and euthanasia. In other words, individuals become the final arbiters of morality which is either self-imposed or imposed by society.

However, we do not live in a universe like that. We are not Lord. We are the creature and God is the Creator. His divine nature and power alone generate humanity's obligation to serve him (Rom 1:18-21; 1 Tim 1:17; 6:15-16). This divine obligation is heightened by the Creator-creature relationship (Rev 4:11) and is further heightened by God in Christ becoming our Redeemer. God's adopted children are owned twice over: once by their Creation and again by their Adoption/Redemption (Eph 1:4-5; 1 Cor 6:19-20). The people of God now live to please and glorify God in everything (1 Cor 10:31; 1 Thess 4:1).



Ultimate reality is God...Therefore everything exists for his pleasure and glory. Therefore Man is not an autonomous, free agent

Our Christian ethic must recognise our moral obligation to God. God's existence as Creator and Redeemer is the cause and meaning of our existence. His *adopted creatures* live to serve, please, enjoy and glorify the Triune God. Our morality must therefore correspond to this reality. This will require us to resist the self-referencing, autonomous spirit of our age and to submit our moral values, beliefs and behaviour to this basic test: does it please and glorify God?

2. God is *love*...therefore love

This second point follows on logically from the first point. Having established divine moral obligation, God's word reveals his moral character that we are called to imitate. Not surprisingly, this divine character is reflected and expressed in God's moral law for humanity. God called a people to be a light to the nations and a vehicle for his values and standards. The Ten Commandments and the rest of the Law functioned in this way, along with protecting and maintaining God's covenant relationship with his people (Ex 20-23; Deut 30:11-20).

Jesus' person and work **fulfil** or **complete** the Law (Matt 5:17; cf. Rom 10:4). This took place on at least two levels: On the most basic level, Jesus fulfilled the prophecies about the Messiah and his Kingdom, and in his person and work is the **goal** or **fruition** of all that the Old Testament anticipated (Lk 24:25-27, 44-47; Jn 19:30).



On another level, as the true Israel and Son of God (Jn 15:1; 17:1-5), Jesus perfectly kept the law and so became a perfect sacrifice for our transgression of the law (Heb 5:8-9; 7:26-10:18; cf. Rom 8:1-4). God 'made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we become the righteousness of God' (2 Cor 5:21; cf. Isa 53:11; Rom 5:18-21; Phil 3:7-9). In Christ, therefore, we are righteous in status, and, by the Spirit, we are becoming righteous in character (Rom 8:1-11; Heb 10:14; 1 Pet 1:2; 2 Cor 3:17-18). On the Day Jesus appears in glory we will see him and become just like him (1 Jn 3:2; 1 Pet 1:6-9; Heb 12:23)!

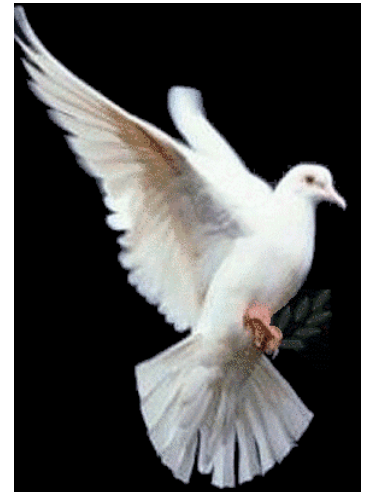
Jesus' fulfillment of the Mosaic Law in these ways has changed the believer's relationship to the law. Jesus' life and death (satisfying the demands and penalty of the law in our place) and the subsequent gift of the Holy Spirit (granting new hearts with a new desire and capacity to love and obey God – 2 Cor 3:6; Heb 8:8-13) mean that life under the New Covenant releases God's people from both the **penalty** and the **demands** of the law, 'so that we may serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit' (Rom 7:6; cf. 6:1-8:11; Gal 3:19-29; 5:13-6:10). **This is very important for our purposes.** It means that the Mosaic Law as a detailed ethical framework has been both fulfilled by Jesus (in the ways shown) and replaced by life in the Spirit.

The righteousness that God gives us through faith in Christ is expressed by love

We now find ourselves as new creations in a new epoch of God's salvation history with a new way of serving him: In Christ through the Spirit (Gal 3:23-27). The indwelling Holy Spirit is our constant guide and enabler of moral (Christian) behaviour. Of course, this behaviour corresponds to the moral principles of the Mosaic Law, for, as we have seen, they reflect the very character of God.

Christ expects his followers to live out the true intent of the law which demands a greater righteousness than that of the Pharisees – one of the heart (Matt 5:17-20; cf. Mk 7:14-23). This greater righteousness is illustrated in the rest of the Sermon on the Mount. The demands of discipleship contained there may be seen to be the ‘commandments’ that Jesus insists are maintained in the Kingdom of God – see Matthew 5:19. **They therefore function as ethical guidelines for life inside the Kingdom.** In the same way, the Beatitudes prescribe the ethical **character** required of Jesus’ followers (Matt 5:2-12). In fact, this character provides the necessary conditions for living out the righteous life prescribed in the rest of the sermon.

God’s Son was condemned for our sin ‘in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit’ (Rom 8:4). This means that the Christian life is an ethical life. Informed by the law and empowered and led by the Spirit, we live by the ‘law’ of Love and thus ‘fulfil the law.’ Under the New Covenant of the Spirit (2 Cor 3:6-8) we ‘keep’ the Law and the Prophets by an undivided love for God and by costly love for neighbour (Matt 22:34-40). The Apostle Paul affirms that ‘love is the fulfilling of the law’ (Rom 13:10; cf. Gal 5:14; Jas 2:8). The Christian life does not consist in keeping the Mosaic Law but in ‘faith working through love’ (Gal 5:6); that is, the righteousness that God gives us through faith in Christ is expressed by love.



Another way of understanding the relationship between the Old and New Covenants and the believer’s relationship to them is to see the Old Covenant with the Mosaic Law as a shadow of the reality that is found in Christ and the New Covenant (Heb 10:1); that is, the Law functioned as a witness to the substance that was to be found in Christ. The shadow gave way to that which it was a shadow of – a better priest, a better sacrifice, a better Covenant – and in the process becoming obsolete (Heb 8:13).

The primacy of love in a very being of God who ‘is ‘anyone who does not love God is love’ (1 Jn 4:8). cross of Christ: ‘In this is God but that he loved us propitiation for our sins. we also ought to love one **we have an ethical applicable, everywhere, all – total devotion to God that others for their highest good.**

Love defines God’s very being. The triune God consists in persons in other-person-centred relationship.

Christian ethic arises from the love’ (1 Jn 4:16). Therefore does not know God, because Further, love is defined by the love, not that we have loved and sent his Son to be the Beloved, if God so loved us, another’ (1 Jn 4:10-11). **Here principle that is universally of the time, without exception shows itself in selfless service of**

Love defines God's very being. The triune God consists in persons in other-person-centred relationship. The Father loves the Son (Jn 3:35). The Son loves the Father and expresses this love by obeying the Father (Jn 14:31). The Spirit is self-effacing and glorifies the Son (Jn 16:13-14). **Therefore ultimate meaning consists in other-person-centred relationships of mutual love. Human reality is a moral reality whose being and character are love.**

Ultimate meaning consists in other-person-centred relationships of mutual love

This is underscored by the fact that God made humans in his own image (Gen 1:26-30). An important part of what it means to be like God is to be in personal relationships of love. This is immediately apparent in God's creation of humanity as male and female who are made to complement each other in an intimate, one-flesh relationship (Gen 1:27; 2:18-25). The image of God was marred by the Fall of humanity resulting in the dislocation of our relationship with God, each other and the world (Gen 3). However, Christ as the GodMan is the perfect image of God (Heb 2:5-9; Col 1:15) who perfectly

loved his heavenly Father and neighbour. In him and by his Spirit his people are transformed into the same image (2 Cor 3:18; cf. Rom 8:28-29). Unsurprisingly, the chief fruit of the Spirit is love (Gal 5:22).

Summarising so far, we have proposed that a Christian ethic should rest on the principles of divine moral obligation and love. God is Creator and Redeemer, therefore we must obey his will for his creation. God is love, therefore as his image-bearers we must treat all people equitably and do by them what is the most just and loving thing to do.

3. The Kingdom of God



This third point can be seen to encapsulate the others. It refers to the Biblical framework or Christian worldview that must inform our Christian ethic and moral decisions. A worldview is an integrated way of seeing and interpreting the world. A Christian worldview reflects the progressive stages of Biblical or redemptive history: God's eternal purpose that may be represented in this way:

Creation	God's Kingdom established
Fall	God's Kingdom rejected
Israel/Law	God's Kingdom foreshadowed
Jesus Christ	God's Kingdom inaugurated
New Creation	God's Kingdom consummated

We will briefly consider each stage and its relevance to a Christian ethic.

Creation – God’s Kingdom established

Under point one (‘God *is*...therefore we *ought*’), we saw that the fact of God as Creator (and Redeemer) establishes divine moral obligation. We may now see that creation also establishes divine order and purpose and that this gives our Christian ethic an **objective foundation**.

The creation account in chapter one of Genesis stresses, among other things, that God built into his creation, order and purpose. Things are ordered ‘according to their kinds’ (Gen 1:11, 12, 21, 24, 25) and their purpose. In fact there is a close link between design and purpose.

Regarding purpose, the plants and fruit trees were given to humankind for food (1:29), the luminaries were given for times, seasons and light (1:14-15), and humankind was created as

God’s image bearer on the earth, to fill and rule it (1:26-28). Humanity was created in two kinds or sexual natures: male and female, who would join together in a ‘one flesh’ union for the purpose of intimate relationship and procreation (1:27-28; 2:24). **Here the link between design and purpose is most evident and is foundational to our thinking about human sexuality and relationships.** Humanity’s ultimate purpose was to be in intimate friendship with God (3:8), a profound union that the marriage relationship expresses and points to (Eph 5:31-32; Ezek 16; Hos 2; Song of Solomon; Rev 19:6-10).



We have seen that nature (or design) and purpose are inextricably intertwined. **God has ordered his creation according to each part’s good purpose.** This is why the Bible can speak of certain actions as either being consistent with or contrary to the nature of the person or thing doing the action. For example, the apostle Paul echoes Genesis 1 and 2 when he condemns homosexual behaviour on the grounds that it is ‘contrary to nature’ (Rom 1:26). The Lord Jesus prohibits divorce on the grounds of God’s creation design for the marriage relationship being permanent (Matt 19:3-6). Cursing other human beings is condemned on the grounds that they are ‘made in the likeness of God’ (Jas 3:9).

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Upon the completion of the creation, God decreed that it was ‘very good’ (Gen 1:31) and rested from his creative work (Gen 2:2). Further, the man and woman were at peace in a one-flesh relationship (Gen 2:24-25). In other words, everything was in perfect harmony in accordance with its nature and purpose. **Here we see God’s Kingdom established. His people are living in his place under his rule, rightly relating to God, each other and the creation.**

Therefore the original Creation order and purpose are a vital element of our Christian ethic for determining what is good and right.

Fall – God’s Kingdom rejected

At the heart of the Fall of humanity is an evil rejection and reversal of God’s good purposes for his creation that results in disharmony, disorder and death (Gen 3; and see the same pattern throughout Genesis chapters 4-11). Adam and Eve distrust God and reject his right to rule. It is very important to understand that at its heart this rebellion comes from a desire to ‘be like God’, to be the arbiter of what is right and wrong (Gen 3:5); in other words, to live outside of God’s Kingdom rule. This same desire for autonomy and the rights of individuals to choose their own values and morality independent of God drives much of the contemporary ethical arguments and debates. We want to ‘be like God,’ even be as God, ruling our lives and our society as we determine.



This fundamental breach of humanity’s purpose and relationship with God has far-reaching consequences. With the rejection of God’s Kingdom comes God’s judgment. This includes alienation from God, and dislocation in our relationships with each other and with the environment (Gen 3:14-24). The Fall has brought futility to human existence (Ecclesiastes; Rom 1:21; 1 Pet 1:18) and to the natural world (Rom 8:19-20). Peoples’ minds have been darkened and their hearts hardened (Eph 4:17-18; 5:8; Rom 1:21; Jn 8:12).

It should therefore not surprise us that humans construct ethical systems and make moral choices that are opposed to God and his good purposes for his creation; systems and choices that are therefore foolish and destructive.

However, in spite of the disorder in the creation, God’s original design and purpose for it remains. This can be seen, for example, in Jesus’ argument against serial adultery (passing for divorce) in his day. Rather than capitulate to the reign of sin in the world and its effect on human relationships (Gen 3), as the Pharisees had, Jesus appeals to God’s creation order/design and purpose for humanity and marriage (Mt 19:3-9). In other words, the objective foundation for our ethic and ensuing morality is and must always be God’s original creation order and purpose. The Fall has marred but not obliterated these.

God’s will cannot ultimately be frustrated nor can his creation purposes fail. Even in the midst of the tragedy of the Fall of humanity there is hope. In Genesis 3:15, right there alongside God’s condemnation and judgment we find the proto-gospel: God’s wonderful promise to re-establish his Kingdom through the woman’s offspring. As we shall see, through the person and work of the woman’s offspring (the Christ), God will restore and fulfil his creation purposes and establish his Kingdom forever. It may be said that the promise of the New Creation was implicit in the promise of Genesis 3:15.

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Israel/Law/Davidic Kingdom – God’s Kingdom foreshadowed

God called Abram and promised to make of him a great nation through which God would bless all the peoples of the earth (Gen 12:1-3). In other words, God promises to restore what was lost in the Fall and to re-establish his rule and order. From Abraham came a people whom God rescued from slavery and with whom he established a covenant relationship. He settled them in the promised Eden-like land to live as his people by his law under his Kingly rule (Deut 28). As in Eden, God would live amongst his people (Deut 12:1-28), though their access to him would be strictly mediated via priests and sacrifices. In fact, life in the land foreshadowed the eternal Sabbath Rest to come in the New Creation (see Heb 4:6-11).

Through Abraham God promises to restore what was lost in the Fall

Tragically, Israel’s history was marked by rebellion against God, by idolatry, injustice and immorality (Neh 9:1-38). One expression of their rebellion was their rejection of God’s kingly rule and their demand for a king like the other nations (1 Sam 8:4-9). God graciously granted their wish for a king. After the false start with Saul, he raised up David as their

victorious warrior King who would enlarge their territory and establish Jerusalem as their capital. **Significantly, God promised David a royal lineage and son whose kingdom God would establish forever (2 Sam 7:1-17).** This promise was partially fulfilled in Solomon, but, in spite of showing great promise, he failed God and the people. Solomon simply mirrored the peoples’ continued disobedience to the Law and breaking of God’s covenant.

God’s promise of an eternal Davidic King and God’s purpose to have a people who would love and glorify him in the world still awaited fulfilment. The Old Covenant (as it would come to be referred to by the New Testament writers) with its land, Law, temple, prophets, priests and kings, foreshadowed God’s New Covenant and Kingdom, in whose King God would finally fulfil his creation purposes and establish his eternal Kingdom (Heb 8:1-10:18; Rev 11:15).

As recognized in point two above (‘God is love...therefore love’), there is continuity between the moral shape of the Old and New Covenants. At the same time, the negative commandments (‘you shall not...’), together with the rest of the Law, are re-stated positively for life under the New Covenant as loving God, loving neighbour (Mt 22:34-40; Rom 13:8-10). As we shall now see, life under the New Covenant in the Kingdom of God involves a new heart and a new love for God and neighbour. The cross of Christ becomes the new paradigm of that love and the resurrection of Christ and gift of the Spirit make that love possible.

Jesus Christ – God’s Kingdom inaugurated

Jesus’ birth was foretold by the angel Gabriel who told Jesus’ mother, Mary, that ‘He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end’ (Lk 1:32-33).

This of course recalls God’s promise to David that we saw earlier (2 Sam 7:1-17). Jesus understood himself to be the unique Son of God and God’s Messiah (Lk 2:49; Jn 5:19-47; 11:25-27). The New Testament writers likewise affirm that Jesus

of Nazareth is the promised Son of David and Son of God (Jn 20:31; Rom 1:1-4). The apostle Paul says of Jesus Christ that ‘all the promises of God find their Yes in him’ (2 Cor 1:20). Paul also says that in Christ Jesus (Eph 3:11). We and its relevance to our



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Jesus is the last Adam, representative head of a new humanity, who, unlike the first Adam and all those who followed, fully trusted and obeyed God (Rom 5:12-21). Jesus is the Man whose humanity God perfected through suffering (Heb 2:5-10; 5:8-9), who is now ‘crowned with glory and honour’ (Heb 2:9), and who in turn is ‘bringing many sons to glory’ (Heb 2:10). His perfect life is credited to those who put their faith in him and on the cross their sin is debited to him (2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:7-11; Rom 5:16-21). His resurrection from the dead is the Father’s vindication of his Son and his sacrifice (Rom 1:1-4). His exaltation to the right hand of God as Lord of heaven and earth, the rightful Ruler of the cosmos (Ac 2:32-33), fulfils God’s creation purposes for humanity (Gen 1:26-31; Psalm 8:3-9; Heb 2:5-9); first in Jesus, and then also in his

people who, through their union with him, share in his glory and rule (Rom 8:16-17; Eph 1:9-10; 2 Pet 1:3; Mt 25:21, 23), to the glory of God (Eph 1:6, 12, 14)! **In and through Jesus, God’s creation order and purpose are being restored.** The people of God experience this order and reconciliation within a world that continues to be disordered and alienated (Eph 2:1-3:12; 2 Cor 4:7-18).

In and through Jesus, God’s creation purposes are being restored

Upon his exaltation to glory, Jesus poured out the promised Holy Spirit (Ac 2:33-34). Applying the work of Christ, the Spirit comes to live with the believer (1 Cor 6:19), regenerating them (Jn 3:1-8; Tit 3:5), making new creations (2 Cor 5:17), restoring the image of God and Christ (2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:10), renewing minds (Rom 8:5; 12:2) and internalizing God's law (Heb 8:10; 10:16; Ezek 36:22-28; Jer 31:31-34). The New Covenant is 'not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life' (2 Cor 3:6). The Holy Spirit brings the believer into spiritual union with Christ, uniting them to his death and resurrection (Rom 8:1-17). Their baptism symbolizes their spiritual washing through Christ's death, their death to sin's rule and their new resurrection life under Christ's rule (Rom 6:1-11). In fact, God raises believers up with Christ and seats them with him in heaven (Eph 2:6; Col 3:3). Through the Spirit God's people are already gathered around Christ in heaven, sharing in his present rule (Heb 12:22-23; Eph 3:10)!

The Holy Spirit also resides with local communities of believers on earth (1 Cor 3:16; Eph 3:21-22), gifting and gathering a people who know and love God, and who love one another and neighbour (1 Cor 12:1-13; 13:1-13; Gal 6:10), serving the world (1 Pet 2:11-17) and witnessing with the Spirit to Christ (Jn 15:26-27; 1 Pet 1:12).



The Father's eternal purposes have indeed been accomplished by Christ and are being applied by the Spirit. Jesus' death not only reconciles people with God but also with one another (Eph 2:13-14). By his death Jesus has created in himself one new man in place of the two (Eph 2:15); in other words, Jesus' death has created and cleansed a new humanity in peace with God and with one another.

The relevance of Jesus' accomplishment for ethics now becomes clear. The cross creates communities of faith characterised by mutual love. Jesus said to the disciples, 'A **new commandment** I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another' (Jn 13:34-35). What is new about Jesus' commandment is the nature of the love we are to show towards one another. We are to love one another just as Jesus has loved us; that is, his death on the cross becomes the paradigm for our relationships: a selfless devotion to God (Mt 16:24-28; Phil 3:10) that is expressed by sacrificial service of others, especially other believers (1 Jn 4:7-21; Jas 2:14-26).

We have proposed that the unifying theme of the Bible is the Kingdom of God, with its central focus being on the gospel of Christ. **This means that the gospel is not only the key to a right understanding of the Bible but also to a Christian ethic.** In the Kingdom

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of God the basis for our ethic is the cross of Christ and the heart of our ethic is love. Therefore the goodness or

otherwise of any motivation, intention, action or behaviour is measured against the gospel.

This conclusion coheres nicely with our first and second points above. In the first point ('God is...therefore we *ought*'), we saw that the principle of divine moral obligation to God as Creator and Redeemer is an important element of our Christian ethic. We must love and serve God because he is our Creator and Redeemer. In the second point ('God is *love*...therefore love'), we saw that because God is love and humans are his image-bearers, love must be another important element of our Christian ethic. Our third point ('The Kingdom of God') has shown that God's salvation history concerns the establishment of his eternal Kingdom. We saw that in creation God established a divine order and purpose for everything, including humanity. This, too, must be foundational to our Christian ethic. Therefore the good and right thing to do will be that which is in accordance with God's design and purpose; and if, as we demonstrated above, the heart of our ethic is love, the good and right decision or action involving other people will be that which will promote God's purpose and so be good for them.

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With Jesus, the reign of God was breaking into history, bringing salvation, defeating Satan, and setting into motion the beginning of the End

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New Creation – God's Kingdom consummated

As we saw in the previous section, at the beginning of his ministry Jesus announced, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel' (Mk 1:14-15). In other words, the Kingdom promised by God through the Old Testament prophets was now present in Jesus; that is, the divine kingly rule was starting in the person and ministry of Jesus. He was the kingdom in person, which is why the New Testament writers equate Jesus with the kingdom (Compare Mt 19:27-29 & Mk 10:29-30 with Lk 18:29; see also Ac 8:12; 28:31). This equation is implicit in the common New Testament phrase, 'the Lord Jesus Christ.'

With Jesus, the reign of God was breaking into history, bringing salvation, defeating Satan, and setting into motion the beginning of the End. Jesus himself and the New Testament writers affirm that the death of Jesus was the defeat of Satan and the inauguration of the Kingdom (Jn 12:31-33; 16:11, 33; Col 2:15; Heb 2:14; cf. Rev 12:7-10). We earlier saw in Genesis 3:15 God's promise of his defeat of Satan.



However, while the Kingdom has come within history, its consummation or full and final manifestation is still to come at the end of history. The death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, and the sending of the Holy Spirit who brings the presence of the future, inaugurate an overlap between the present age and manifestation of the Kingdom and the future age and its manifestation of the Kingdom. So Jesus and the New Testament writers also speak of the future Kingdom when that which is presently concealed will be revealed to all (Mt 7:21-23; 8:11-12; 22:1-14; 1 Cor 6:9; 15:50; 2 Tim 4:18; Rev 11:15).

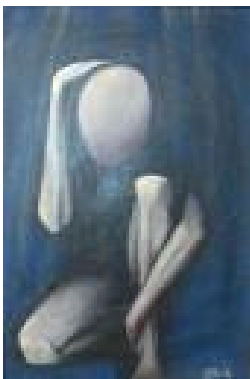
God's people experience this tension between the already but the not yet. They are now in the Kingdom (Col 1:13), already reigning with Christ in heaven (Eph 2:6) with every spiritual blessing in Christ (Eph 1:3); but they await the consummation when God's enemies will be judged and punished (Rev 20:1-14), God's people will be perfected and given glorious resurrection bodies (1 Jn 3:2; 1 Cor 15:35-58), and the whole cosmos will be perfectly united under Jesus in the New Creation (Eph 1:9-10; Col 1:19-20; Rom 8:19-21). In God's plans, good has a future, evil does not.

This state of affairs has important implications for Christian ethics:

Firstly, believers are to live holy and godly lives as they wait expectantly for the coming Kingdom (2 Pet 3:11-13). The Kingdom demands total commitment (Mt 6:33; 13:44-45), with its citizens willing to take drastic action in order not to be disqualified from entering the future Kingdom (Mt 18:7-9). Christian morality is not meritorious but it is essential.

Secondly, the vision of the future Kingdom with its perfected relationships and creation provides God's people with the grand goal that they are to be striving for in all their relationships (with God, each other, neighbour and the natural world) and with a powerful incentive to work together towards that goal. Love, unity, and fidelity to creation order will be high priorities for believers and churches.

Thirdly, God's people live out their Christian ethic in a world that remains characterised by disorder. In such a world, divine moral obligation is rejected, God's purpose for his creation is negotiable at best and violated at worst, and self-love stubbornly substitutes for love for God and neighbour. This calls for realism and longsuffering on the part of God's people. Until the consummation of the Kingdom and perfection of the creation, there simply won't be consummation and perfection! The church must be salt and light in the world, do good to all people, pray and strive for peace, and winsomely witness to the Prince of Peace who transforms lives and even communities. However, we remain in the overlap of the ages with all the attendant tension and angst. Moreover, much of that tension and angst will come from living with our own moral failures and sin. With the apostle Paul we cry:



'Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!...For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God...For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies' (Rom 7:24-25a; 8:19, 22-23).

God's people experience this tension between the already but the not yet...now in the Kingdom but awaiting its consummation

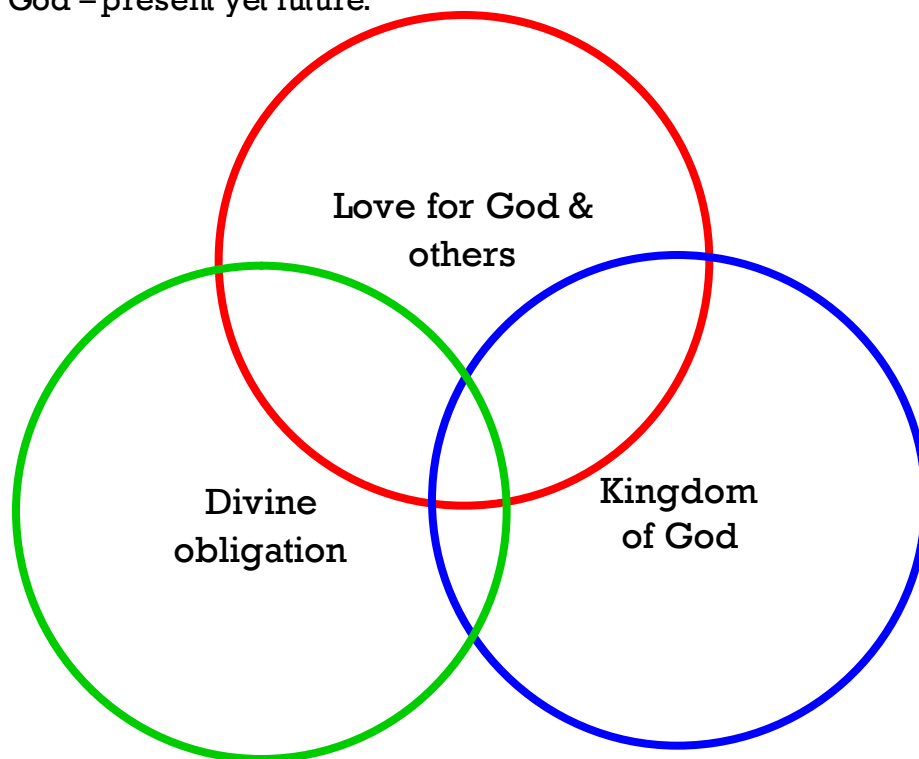
An Anglican Church Response to this tension

In light of the Christian's present and future as described above, and the instances of moral failure that have marred the life and ministry of clergy, the Anglican Church of Australia has developed standards and guidelines for the personal behaviour and practice of its clergy and church workers that are grounded in Scripture and framed and shaped by love. This code of conduct entitled 'Faithfulness in Service' has been adopted by the Diocese of Tasmania with the expectation that its clergy and church workers will faithfully adhere to it in life and ministry. The code forms a foundational and integral part of the Safe Church Communities program within the Diocese and can be viewed:

1. In the Safe Church Communities Webpage
<http://www.anglicantas.org.au/index.php?item=file&target=safeministry-fis>
2. As Schedule 5 of the Ministry and Tribunal Ordinance which can be found in the Ordinances under the Resources tab <http://www.anglicantas.org.au/ordinances/>

Conclusion

We have proposed a Christian (Biblical) ethic that is founded on three inter-locking elements or principles: divine moral obligation, love for God and others, and the Kingdom purposes of God – present yet future.



This ethic provides an objective Biblical basis and guide for our values, motivations, beliefs and behaviour. It is our prayer that you and your church will live in harmony with these great Kingdom realities for the health of your church, the good of society, and for the glory of God.

A suggested prayer

Heavenly Father, you are the sovereign and majestic Creator and Redeemer. You have no beginning, no end, no rival. You are the great three-in-one: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We are your creatures, your children, your people. We owe you our praise, our worship, our lives. Help your church in Tasmania to want your will to be done on earth as in heaven. May obedience to your will begin with us, your people. Help our fellow Tasmanians to see by our example and lives that your purposes are good and perfect and life-giving; and so to embrace them and you. Father, help your church in Tasmania to be good citizens of the world and of Australia, and most of all, of your eternal Kingdom; to please and glorify our King, Jesus, who lived and died and rose again for us. Whose Kingdom has come and is coming. Help us to love as you love; to measure all that we do and say by your revealed will, purpose, love and gospel; and when the way forward is not clear to us, give us your wisdom and the courage of our convictions. Mercifully preserve our nation, our state, and your church. Deliver us from evil. Glorify your Son. In whose great and glorious Name we pray, Amen.