

Ethics: as a moral philosophy

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In summary to the course module above, ethics also known as moral philosophy, is a branch of philosophy that involves systematizing, defending, and recommending concepts of right and wrong behavior.

We live in a time marked by "culture war". Having lost a dominant moral consensus, we are struggling in our courts, voting booths, and even in our churches to resolve the difficult moral issues that are separating us. Many have decided that the answer is tolerance, open-mindedness and mutual respect. While others are convinced that there is time "to be our brother's keeper". They are certain that we cannot afford to merely abandon the moral values of the past and act as if it doesn't matter what we believe about God, sexual choices, or the life of an unborn child (Martin R. De Haan II), believing that the Bible gives profound insights into difficult issues. At this juncture, one may ask, is it Right or Wrong? This is a case for moral absolutes.

In 1903 Mark Twain wrote *A New Crime*, in which he described a series of murders in which wealthy offenders were found innocent by reason of insanity. Twain's essay concludes that, "insanity certainly is on the increase in the world, and crime is dying out. There are no longer any murders-none worth mentioning, at any rate. Formerly, if you killed a man, it was possible that you were insane-but now, if you, having friends and money, kill a man, it is evidence that you are not responsible."

The interpretation is that, our legal system is now in a dilemma. If moral responsibility is, in part, a state of mind, who can say whether a person who commits a crime of passion should be held legally responsible? "What we want now is not laws against crime but a law against insanity. There is where the true lie"-Mark Twain

Today's legal system is faced with more difficult problems. If morality itself is a state of mind, and if there is no longer any social consensus about standards of moral decency, what will keep us from being blown around from year to year by the changing winds of political majority?

At this juncture, one may ask; are all rules of life just a matter of perspective? In trying to answer this question, I may say that, up can be down. Inside can be outside. Right can be left. But, so much depends on circumstances and perspectives at that particular point in time.

For many in our day, the only absolute is that there are no absolutes at all. In trying to decode this dialog, it was noted that, the nature of truth is more than the matter of historical fiction. When Allan Bloom wrote the closing of the American mind in 1987, he described a similar perspective which he said is a characteristic of young Americans. According to Bloom, "there is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes that truth is relative".

Bloom went on to explain that as far as today's student is concerned, "the relativity of truth is not a theoretical insight but a moral postulate, the condition of free society, or so they see it." They believe that for Roman Catholics, Baptists, Hindus, and Atheists to live together in a free society, they must commit themselves to the overriding virtues of tolerance and open-mindedness. Bloom observes that in such a world, "the true believer is a real danger.

The study of history and culture teaches that the entire world was mad in the past; men always thought they were right, and that led to wars, persecutions, slavery, xenophobia, racism, and chauvinism. The point is not to correct the mistakes and really be right; rather it is not to think you are right at all".

This is the mindset of the world in which we live. The values and logic of relativistic age are so woven into the fabric of our culture that it is easy to forget the story of history. We might not want to believe that, Moses got his moral principles from God. But it is hard to deny that when we break the Ten Commandments, they end up breaking us. Like the physical law of gravity, moral absolutes can

seem at times as if they do more harm than good.

The Greek philosopher Protagoras taught in the 5th century BC that human judgment is subjective and that one's perception is valid only for oneself. A still earlier scenario of relativism is found in the book of Judges (17:6, 21:25) which describes one of the darkest periods of human history as a time when "everyone did what was right in his own eyes".

A few generations later, King Solomon, the third king of Israel, struggled with profound questions of significance after rejecting the moral principles of his father David. Known as one of the most intelligent men who ever lived, Solomon tried for a while to sacrifice principles for personal and political peace. From the record of 1 Kings, it appears that he forged an accord with neighboring nations by entering into a series of political marriages with the daughters of pagan kings (1 Kings 11:1-11).

From Solomon's writings in Ecclesiastes, it seems he searched for personal satisfaction in a wide range of life experiences including: education, music, alcohol, relationships, and better homes and gardens. Each time Solomon came up troubled in trying to change circumstances of life he noticed there was an external hole in his heart that no pleasure could fill. Through final evaluation of his perplexity, he could not deny that even the seasons of life seemed to have lasting purpose and beauty. In view of his search that he discovered that:

For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven:

A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; a time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace. What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboreth? I have seen the travail which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised therewith. He hath made everything beautiful in its time: also he hath set eternity in their heart, yet so that man cannot find out the work that God hath done from the beginning even to the end (Eccl. 3:1-11 ASV).

Solomon in his thoughtful moments found a hole in his heart. Challenged by the beauty of life's seasons, and unable to satisfy his own appetite with the pleasures of time, he remembered the Lord God Almighty in whose likeness he was created and said:

This is the end of the matter; all hath been heard: fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every work into judgment, with every hidden thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil (Eccl. 12:13-14 ASV)

Jesus Christ showed us the relationship between moral absolutes and a loving attitude by teaching us the laws that meet the requirement of a moral absolute.

•→ Absolutes to protect faith and worship: When a legal expert questioned Jesus to identify the most important of all laws, Jesus answered, "And he said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with thy entire mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second like unto it is this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments the whole law hangeth, and the prophets" (Matthew 22: 37-40 ASV).

Jesus could have answered the Pharisees by quoting the God of Moses, who said, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exodus 20:2-3). Instead, Jesus saw their need. Because of their love for religious law, they thought that was the love of God. But they didn't love Him as much as they thought. Otherwise, they would have loved the people He loved.

•→ Absolutes to protect the family: Jesus also kept the spirit of the timeless laws that were meant to protect the family. By respecting Mary and Joseph, even when He knew more than they did, He taught us that, "honor your father and your mother" (Exodus 20:12).

•→ Absolutes to protect the sacredness of life: With a concern in the history of Cain murdering his brother Abel, Moses said, "You shall not murder". The command means that for all people in all times, it is wrong to shed innocent blood. It is a principle that finds its basis not only in the preservation of human life but in the sacred nature of the likeness of God.

•→ Absolutes to protect honest relationships: God consistently forbids in Scripture all forms of stealing, dishonesty, and deceit. The eighth of the Ten Commandments is "You shall not steal" (Ex. 20:15). The ninth commandment is, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (v. 16), the tenth law concludes, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's" (v. 17). These commandments, together with Paul's command, "Do not lie to another"(Col. 3:9), reflects God's timeless standard for honest, heartfelt relationships. In conclusion, justice and equality will become realities not by superficially incorporating tolerance, but by embracing absolute truth, a transcendental truth that includes the foundation for both moral law and human value, an unwavering truth which at times may even demand intolerance. It is a truth that only a God who is a righteous Judge and a loving Creator can establish.

Critique:

The authors of this course module made it simplified, easy but difficult to decode certain phrases that were used in some of the lessons. Even though, the story-like nature of the course made it really interesting that made me glued to my seat in order to know the moral implications of those stories.

In my own view of Allen Bloom's logic behind the assumption that truth is relative, I think Bloom is saying that instead of searching for mankind's past faults, the world has condemned our ability to claim to be right at all.

In my own perspective of the relationship between moral absolutes and a loving attitude that Jesus Christ cited in Matthew 22: 37-40, I sense that, unlike the Pharisees, Jesus was unable to keep absolutes in perspective and balance. While they might have expected Him to begin by quoting the first of the Ten Commandments, they didn't expect Him to answer them in such a way to expose their hypocritical behavior. In defining this first moral absolute (Absolutes to protect faith and worship), Jesus showed all of us our deep need for forgiveness.

From the second definition of moral absolute (Absolutes to protect the family), it is clear that honoring our parents is our first opportunity to see if we have anything to learn from history. Today, we live in a world that young people live in a cultural setting that encourages them to question authority rather than to honor it. Is this the kind of indecent behavior that came with human rights or freedom of expression? But, I think some of this suspicion is necessary because of the toxic nature of many parents, governments, and religious institutions. The Bible itself warns that, it is a mistake to follow the example or the footsteps of godless fathers as is stated in 2 Kings 21:20 "And he did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah, as did Manasseh his father".

Truth is reality, the way things really are. Therefore it is the explanation of all things. You know you have found the truth when you find something which is wide enough and deep enough and high enough to encompass all things. That is what Jesus Christ does.

The writer of Hebrews wrote that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, and yes, forever." The truth of Christ is much more encompassing than anything this world has to offer.

If you are walking in truth, you will discover that there is a time for both tolerance and intolerance. Unfortunately, Christians have a long way to go in matching His standard.

All too often, we are hampered by racial differences and social barriers. Perhaps it's time that we began to raise our voice against injustice and not leave it up to the ebbing multiculturalist movement. Yet as accepting as Jesus was, He was extremely rigid about the exclusiveness of His claims. Of all the choices in life, He tells us there is only one way, one truth, and one life, His. How much more exclusive, even intolerant, can you get? Christians need to remember that loving another person may sometimes mean being respectfully but firmly intolerant of what is not true.

Personal Benefits:

At the end of the course module, I was remembered to love my neighbor because that is the whole duty of man, love is not a respecter of persons and as a believer loving humanity is the love of God. I will continue to remember young people to give honor to their elderly if only it is the right way of our Lord Jesus Christ and in the same way remember the elderly to teach young people the way that

can be emulated.
