

Christian Ethics

Module 3.3

In Module 3.2 we explored the commitment of Charis Fellowship churches to a specific method of hermeneutics, or Bible interpretation. Our method, first and foremost, asks the question, “what has God said through the human author of Scripture, to the original recipients of Scripture.” To answer such a question, we explored how the interpreter is to use grammatical, historical, and contextual principles of interpretation in his or her approach to understanding God’s word. Once we understand what God has said then, and only then, are able to take the next step in applying what God has said to our lives today.

Christian Ethics is the disciple of Christian theology that seeks to apply the clear teaching of Scripture to unclear areas of life. The Charis Fellowship believes this discipline is of upmost importance and that we must do the hard work necessary in this field.

Specifically, we commit to an ongoing study, understanding, and application of God’s unchanging truth in our constantly changing world, whether personal, social, or cultural.

For example, while the New Testament does give clear instructions regarding how believers are to submit themselves to civil authorities, it does not give Christian Americans instructions about what political candidate/party they are to support...if any. In this instance, the discipline of Christian Ethics would seek to take what God has made clear in his Word and apply those truths to the everchanging landscape of politics.

Another example can also be found in the quickly advancing field of biological research and development. The authors of Scripture never specifically address the issues of genetic mutation and embryonic cryopreservation. Nevertheless, God’s Word is clear about life, the creation of life, how believers must think about life, and how they are to relate to those who are living. Here, Christian Ethics applies clear biblical truths to the unclear areas of bioethics.

Christian Ethics also provides an interpersonal framework for us in engaging with those who may believe differently than us, both believers and non-believers. Regarding this framework for interpersonal engagement, think back to the earlier example of politics. One believer may vote Republican, another Democrat, and the two may have passionately held biblical convictions leading them to those conclusions. Here, Christian Ethics not only helps these believers do the hard work of determining how they live as Christian Americans, but also how to respond, and relate, to one another.

The clear truths of Scripture regarding how we are to be in fellowship¹ with one another must be applied to the ever-changing areas of potential disagreements. Regardless of what the differences, or disagreements are, our unity in Christ must be front and center and the shared commitment of each.

Lastly, two particular notes of caution must be made regarding the words “ethics,” or “unethical” and their usage today. First, it is popular today for some to cite certain behaviors as “unethical.” However, if this determination is made outside of a biblical worldview, the term “unethical” only means “outside of the moral norms accepted by society.” In this case the term “unethical” potentially may become “ethical” at some point in the future if society changed its views about regarding certain behaviors.

Believers, however, must be abundantly clear that if something is unethical, it is sinful. While there may not be a verse specifically citing a particular behavior, or scientific field of research, as sinful, the correct interpretation and application of God’s Word only leads to the conclusion that the particular behavior in view, or scientific field of research, is sinful. It is not just outside the accepted norms of society, it is out of step with God’s Word and must be repented of.

Secondly, while we must be clear that there are behaviors not specifically mentioned in the Bible that are unethical, we must equally be careful to not label “unethical” (sinful) the personal convictions of others that we may disagree with, if they are not indeed sinful.

In Romans chapter 14 the Apostle Paul writes about sabbath observance, eating certain foods and drinking wine. In doing so he gives instructions to those who were not all in agreement with one another and rather than demand that everyone practice the same thing within these areas of Christian liberty, Paul tells them to “not pass judgement on one another” (Romans 14:13) and not “make another stumble” (Romans 14:20).² Pointedly then, to apply his instructions from a Christian Ethics perspective, it is actually sinful (unethical) to practice your personal liberty in such a way that makes another believer stumble, and it is equally sinful (unethical) to label areas of Christian liberty that you disagree with as sinful.

Charis Fellowship churches share a commitment to the hard and necessary work of Christian Ethics because it is vitally important that we continually submit ourselves, our churches, and our cultures, to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. To this end we believe that God’s word is unchanging and truthful. As we live in a constantly changing world we must continually do the hard work of applying God’s truth to the issues of today.

¹ See Module 3.8

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