

E. The Problem of Christian Ethics

What is it that makes an action right or wrong, good or bad?

What is the standard, the criterion, the horizon of reference, by which we decide the morality of an action?

What standard shall we choose? And can we find an absolute standard, or must we settle for moral relativity?

Some standards that have been proposed include the following:

- Conscience
- The Highest Good (summum bonum)
- Pleasure
- Happiness
- Duty
- Self-realization
- Human law
- Public opinion
- Private opinion
- Nature, might, adaptation to environment

None of these standards (being anthropocentric) is absolute or adequate as an all-encompassing and dependable criterion for right and wrong, good and bad.

As Christians we are committed to the existence of the God who has revealed Himself in Scripture and in the person of His Son. We accept God's revelation as the source of our sufficient and authoritative standard or criterion of faith and conduct; and we set out to discover the system of ethics that is revealed in the Holy Scriptures.

Thus our approach to Christian ethics will be centered in and oriented by Scripture, rather than some other standard or criterion.

I. UNDERLYING DISTINCTIONS IN CHRISTIAN ETHICS

A. Values, Norms, and Laws

A "value" is a quality or characteristic considered excellent, useful, or desirable; one held in high esteem, prized, important.

A "norm" is a rule or authoritative standard.

A "law" is a rule of conduct or action prescribed by a governing authority and enforced by a sanction.

Example employing the value of punctuality:

Value -- "Being on time for class is desirable and important"

Norm -- "Students ought to be on time for class"