

PHL 503 Biblical Ethics – Lecture 1

- I. Introductory remarks. What justifies your ethical viewpoint? Everyone has a philosophy on ethics. The question is whether it is correct/justifiable.
- II. Definition. Ethics is not necessarily what is right and what is wrong because every philosopher has a different idea of what is right and what is wrong.
 - A. Different thoughts by philosophers.
 1. Spencer. Right is whatever enables the survival of the fittest (evolutionary hedonist).
 2. Jeremy Bentham. Right is the greatest amount of pleasure for the greatest number of people (utilitarianism).
 3. Lenin. Right is what advances world communism.
 4. Charles Stevenson. Right is simply what I approve and try to get others to approve (non-cognitivist).
 5. Aristotle. Right is the middle balance between two extremes.
 6. Carniades. Right is self-interest.
 7. Machiavelli. Right is power.
 8. Hobbes. Right is power and pleasure.
 9. Protagoras. Man is the measure of all things; right is relative to each individual.
 10. Thrasymachus. Justice is the interest of the stronger party (might makes right).
 - B. Presuppositions. Why did these philosophers say this was right and this was wrong? What were their presuppositions?
 - C. Tactical advantage. Because of the unity of the truth, false systems are going to be irrational. Thus they will somewhere be inconsistent. Because Christians have the truth, we have the ability to sink the ship of an unbeliever. There is no need to be intimidated!
- III. Christian presuppositions for ethics.
 - A. Christian definition of ethics. Ethics is the study of what God's Word says about "x," "x" being any topic, for the purpose of developing a logically consistent explanation of what past and present persons, acts, and attitudes are obedient to and blessed by God, and which are disobedient to and judged by God, as a means of deepening our covenant relationship with God.
 - B. Breakdown of the definition.
 1. Exegetical Theology. Christian ethics presuppose the study of what God's Word says.
 2. Systematic Theology. Christian ethics presupposes that we relate one topic in Scripture to the whole of Scripture.
 3. History. We learn ethical lessons from the past, 2 Peter 3:5.
 4. Logic. Christian ethics presuppose an intelligibility and consistency.
 5. Ethics proper. It deals with the justification of right and wrong, the source of right and wrong, and the consequences of right and wrong.
 6. Practical Theology. Ethics is not primarily an academic exercise, but is intended to affect our behavior and relationship before God, 2 Cor. 10:5,31; Rom. 14:23.
 - C. The Bible is the justification for ethics.