

Principles of Conduct – Chapter 1 – Introductory Questions

In this chapter Murray discusses some preliminary questions pertinent to a discussion on Biblical or Christian ethics. Biblical ethics is concerned with the manner of life and behavior which the Bible requires and demands, and which the faith of the Bible produces.

Ethics involves several considerations. It is concerned with not only the overt act, but the motive and disposition behind the external and overt act. It is not only concerned with individual responsibility and actions, but also corporate responsibility and action.

The study of Biblical ethics is not a survey of the actions of Biblical characters. This would be purely descriptive, a “what is” and not a “what ought.” In Biblical ethics, attention is given to divine demand, not upon human achievement; upon the revelation of God’s will for man, not upon human action.

From the outset Biblical ethics seems plagued with the question of the relationship between the ethic of the Old Testament and that of the New. The answer to this question is that although there was a difference in sufferance and tolerance with regard to certain sinful acts, there is no difference in the identification of acts as sinful. There was also a difference in guilt because of the progressive nature of revelation. The more revelation one receives, the more responsible he becomes.

Another very important question in Biblical ethics is the relationship between love and law. It should be noted that the emotion of love itself is a commandment and therefore a law. The law is the proper means or channel for expressing our affinity. The emotion of love cannot establish its own law, nor can the renewed consciousness be its own monitor.