ETHICS AS WORSHIP

The Pursuit of Moral Discipleship

Mark D. Liederbach
Evan Lenow

Foreword by Ligon Duncan

With a Word from Daniel L. Akin

"Liederbach and Lenow provide a robust survey of Christian ethics. The discussion of theology's interaction with metaethics and normative ethics is especially helpful."

—**J. Alan Branch**, Professor of Christian Ethics, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

"*Ethics as Worship* is a most intriguing title. In our world, ethics is often a manipulative game to justify what our group wants to do. Basing ethics on our relationship with the Lord of Exodus 34:6–7, however, is a graciously firm foundation. Thus, ethics is not about specific choices but about what makes the character of our Lord visible in our deeds, which flow from our loving him with our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Since he is Lord of all, that sort of ethic will guide every part of our lives as individuals and in community. The unique foundation, careful metaethical development, and wise application in the most difficult issues make this a magnificent contribution to worshipful living."

—**Gerry Breshears**, Professor of Theology, Western Seminary

"*Ethics as Worship* is a theologically framed, deeply informed, and richly integrated guide to thinking and living—each day—as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Liederbach and Lenow instruct and invite, equipping and inspiring the reader to both 'be' and 'live' ethics as worship."

—**W. David Buschart**, Professor of Theology and Historical Studies, Denver Seminary

"*Ethics as Worship* is an excellent and comprehensive work that orients and overlays ethics as an expression of worship to the glory of God. As I teach seminary worship classes, I emphasize the place of corporate gathered worship in equipping the people of God and transforming them into greater Christlikeness in a way that is lived out missionally between Sundays in all of life as worship. *Ethics as Worship* has great potential to introduce, enhance, and bring this focus into the field of ethics, including substantial application to eleven presenting issues that we as the people of God face in our day-to-day lives."

—**Mark Dalbey**, President and Professor of Applied Theology, Covenant Theological Seminary

"As our world spirals further into confusion with every passing day, the study of ethics has never been more important. This excellent volume by Mark Liederbach and Evan Lenow is exactly the kind of book that we need for this moment. Drawing from biblical and theological foundations, it demonstrates that, rightly

understood, ethics is about worship of the one true God. Christians of every perspective will want to read and digest this book."

—**Jamie Dew**, President and Professor of Christian Philosophy, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

"Too often the discipline of ethics focuses on minutiae that can become overwhelming to students and generalists. *Ethics as Worship*, however, focuses on the glory of God and the alignment of God's will, God's Word, and the behavior of God's people. The result is a mixture of exaltation and practicality, orthodoxy and orthopraxy, as Liederbach and Lenow carefully unfold their approach with wisdom and discernment."

—**Gene C. Fant Jr.**, President and Professor of English, North Greenville University

"Right behavior is one of the most important ways in which gospel-transformed people worship their Creator. We must grasp this insight or our gospel will remain too narrow to change our lives, and our ethics will remain either permissive or legalistic. *Ethics as Worship* zeroes in on this essential issue for a church that desperately needs to reconnect ethics with religious experience."

—**Greg Forster**, Director, Oikonomia Network

"This book is an important contribution to the field of Christian ethics and ultimately to Christian discipleship. Mark Liederbach and Evan Lenow get to the heart of ethics by articulating something that is often missed in other resources: the end of ethical living is the worship of God. They not only present a good big picture of ethics as worship to God, but also provide areas of application in ways that challenge us how to think rightly about Christian morality. Their work is an asset to the field of Christian ethics and will be a valuable resource for years to come."

—**RaShan Frost**, Executive Director, 1 Charleston; Lead Pastor/Church Planter, The Bridge Church, Charleston, South Carolina; Adjunct Professor of Christian Studies, Charleston Southern University

"*Ethics as Worship* is the book that I have been waiting for. Authors Liederbach and Lenow approach ethics in a way that is biblically faithful, philosophically robust, and accessible to students. By framing ethics as worship, this book brings issues of applied ethics into the realm of discipleship where it belongs. Not only will readers grow in their understanding of ethics, but, more importantly, they will grow in their love of Jesus and in faithfulness to him."

—**Adam Groza**, Associate Professor of Philosophy of Religion and Vice President of Enrollment and Student Services, Gateway Seminary

"In *Ethics as Worship*, Liederbach and Lenow connect conservative Christian theology and biblical interpretation to the call for Christians to live out our worship of Jesus in a variety of life's most challenging situations. This volume grounds its ideas in a clear, mature, and nuanced framework that provides a balanced biblical perspective that will challenge Christians on both sides of our current political divide to love Jesus more deeply. Christians who engage this text will consider their actions and life more clearly, ponder their motivations and outcomes more sincerely, and recognize more urgently the need to worship Jesus now and forever."

—**Peter Link Jr.**, Associate Professor of Christian Studies, Charleston Southern University

"This important book tells us to ascribe to the God of the Bible all he deserves from the entirety of our holistic selves as an act of loving devotion. Once ethics as worship becomes our regular orientation, we can tackle all the sticky cultural issues of our day. Please use this very helpful resource in your classrooms, in your churches, and with your families."

—**Dwayne Milioni**, Pastor, Professor, and Board Chairman, Pillar Church Planting Network

"In classical ethical theories, ethics is about the actor, the character of the person making the virtuous choice. In modern ethical theories, ethics is about the action, the choice that the person makes. Mark Liederbach and Evan Lenow demonstrate clearly from Scripture that ethics is about God and our whole-person worship of him. This volume is God-centered, biblically rigorous, pastorally helpful, and delightfully refreshing. Read it as an act of worship."

—**C. Ben Mitchell**, Graves Professor of Moral Philosophy (ret.), Union University; former editor, *Ethics and Medicine: An International Journal of Bioethics*; Senior Fellow, Academy of Fellows of The Center for Bioethics & Human Dignity

"In a time and context when Christians need to rethink both their private and public ethical approaches, Liederbach and Lenow's *Ethics as Worship* is both timely and helpful. The text assists Christians in navigating difficult topics by viewing them through a biblical lens and by reconsidering ethical behavior as worship through an expression of love and care for neighbor. Given a long history of evangelical Christian approaches to slavery, the civil rights movement, abuse, and even modern justice struggles, this text should help believers navigate a complex modern world. *Ethics as Worship* will help seminary students, college students, and all others who want to more deeply consider their ethical framework as Christians living for the kingdom."

—**Otis W. Pickett**, Associate Professor of History, Mississippi College

"Yes! An understanding of ethics that centers on God, is saturated with the gospel, and is inextricably tied to the mission that Jesus has given his church to make disciples of all nations. *Ethics as Worship* provides desperately needed ballast for our souls amid a sea of ethical confusion that surrounds us in this world."

—**David Platt**, Pastor, McLean Bible Church, McLean, Virginia; author, *Radical*, *Follow Me*, and *Counter Culture*

"In an age when orthodoxy is too often severed from orthopraxy, the church needs a work such as *Ethics as Worship: Moral Discipleship to the Glory of God*, which puts right belief and right action back together again. This comprehensive text not only has a firm biblical foundation but fairly and effectively engages with our broader cultural context and its countervailing perspectives. This is a work of serious scholarship and of immense worth in practical application."

—**Karen Swallow Prior**, Research Professor of English and Christianity and Culture, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary; author, *On Reading Well: Finding the Good Life through Great Books*; coauthor, *Cultural Engagement: A Crash Course in Contemporary Issues*

"As the leader of an organization dedicated to inspiring and equipping Christians to become better stewards of their lives and the world that God has given us, I enthusiastically offer my endorsement to *Ethics as Worship* by Liederbach and Lenow.

"This text is refreshing in that it develops the biblical foundations for *why* before explaining the biblical commands that guide our *what* and *how*. Too often, discussions of ethics fall on the side of moralistic legalism or vague calls to love one another. This text, however, avoids both extremes, seeking instead to place the entire ethical enterprise in context of loving worship of God, which in turn guides our obedience to the commands of Scripture. By focusing on both the Old and New Testament themes of worship, the authors show how pursuit of the person of Christ ought to both drive a passionate devotion to God and result in transformative flourishing in individuals and society as a whole. In this way, the discipline of ethics is transformed from an enumeration of duties to an adventure of joy that ends in human flourishing under the lordship of Christ.

"This book is a well-ordered, biblically sound, and theologically satisfying exploration of the discipline of ethics."

—**Matthew Sleeth**, Executive Director, Blessed Earth

"Liederbach and Lenow fill a void that has long been missing in the study of Christian ethics by beautifully balancing a classic deontological ethic with a biblically informed virtue ethic. Their well-researched treatment of contemporary ethical

issues is biblical, pastoral, and missional. They show that ethics flows more from a life of discipleship than from an application of rules."

—**John K. Tarwater**, Associate Professor of Finance, Cedarville University School of Business Administration

"It is common to think of ethics as merely an exercise in abstract navel-gazing. What Mark Liederbach and Evan Lenow have done is the opposite: situating ethics as an expression of our love for God—and there's nothing abstract or dispassionate about loving God. We're told by Christ to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind. Add to that *ethics*. I look forward to seeing this book make an impact in the wider evangelical orbit."

—**Andrew T. Walker**, Associate Professor of Christian Ethics, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; author, *Liberty for All*

"Mark Liederbach and Evan Lenow have made a wonderful contribution to the field of Christian ethics. *Ethics as Worship* offers fresh insights for Christian moral reasoning on contemporary issues ranging from metaethical foundations to emerging issues in applied ethics. Liederbach and Lenow's extensively researched, nuanced, and charitable treatment of each issue sets an example of what evangelical ethics should be."

—**Tim Yonts**, Instructor, Christian Ethics; Associate Director of LU Serve, Liberty University

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For our students

Contents

Part 4: The Application of Ethics as Worship

Illustrations

Figures

Tables

Foreword

Many of us live in a society in which sexual orientation and gender identity, climate change and care for the environment, capital punishment and criminal justice reform, racism and poverty, abortion, euthanasia, and physician-assisted suicide are hotly debated and polarizing issues. Who would have thought they were all about worship? Allow me to explain.

Christians believe that two aspects of worship are very important for the believing life: congregational worship and worship in all of life. In congregational worship (which is sometimes called *corporate worship or public worship*), God's people gather on the Lord's Day to meet with God and give him the glory due his name according to his Word, as his Word is read, preached, prayed, and sung, and as baptism and the Lord's Supper (his "visible words," Augustine called them) are administered. This aspect of worship (public worship) actually disciples Christians in how they are supposed to live the rest of their lives (worship in all of life).

Worship in all of life is what Paul is especially talking about in Romans 12:1–2: "Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." This passage begins an extended treatment of ethical issues in Romans 12–15. There, Paul is especially exhorting us about our whole manner of life, what we do in the totality of our thoughts, desires, speech, and actions. In other words, he is calling us to live our whole lives as worship to God. He wants believers to approach their lives by viewing themselves as living, breathing, walking, talking offerings to God (hence "living sacrifices"). To say it yet another way, Paul wants us to give our whole selves, the whole of our lives, to God as an act of worship. This means that how we live *is* worship. It shows our ultimate allegiance and our highest priority. It reveals our deepest convictions.

This is why Elizabeth Payson Prentiss, in her novel disguised as a journal, *Stepping Heavenward*, has Ernest say to Katy, "Every act of obedience is an act

of worship." What we believe, desire, say, and do are all expressions of worship. Hence, ethics is worship—the very thing that the writers of this book, *Ethics as Worship*, are considering. Personally, I believe that this aspect of the work, in and of itself, is worth the price of admission. They ask us to consider all our conduct, private and public, internal and external, individual and corporate, as worship.

And so whether we are considering justice and social engagement, race, ethnicity, and kingdom diversity, wealth and poverty, creation care and environmental stewardship, capital punishment, war, abortion, euthanasia, physician-assisted suicide, and end-of-life decision-making, sexuality, marriage, divorce, and remarriage, contraception, birth control, and reproductive technologies, and the like, it's all about worship. Whom we worship, from the heart, according to his instruction, in all of life, will show itself in our ethics. In fact, Liederbach and Lenow define Christian ethics as "a Christ-centered response of thanksgiving, rightly ordered by Scripture to be a service unto God in obedient love that is formed and embodied in a discipleship that is oriented missionally, such that all creation might once again do what it was created to do: maximally render unto God all the praise, honor, and glory that he is due."

The very first course I taught as a newly minted systematic theology professor at Reformed Theological Seminary was Pastoral and Social Ethics. I wish I had had this volume to help me put that course together. Numerous features in this book stand out to me. For one, the tables sprinkled throughout the book are especially useful, for students and teachers alike, and I can see this volume as providing great assistance to both.

Their discussion of worldview (an idea that has undergone a serious cross-examination in the last few years) in relation to ethics is very helpful. Their inclusion of topics sometimes overlooked in evangelical ethical discussion (racism, societal justice, culturally embedded sin patterns, etc.), and their clear, calm, careful treatment of them, would make many of our current arguments better. I love their embrace and deployment of the threefold aspect of the law, and of the so-called third use of the law, as well as their gracious and compelling articulation of complementarianism, biblical sexuality, and more.

Liederbach and Lenow also engage knowledgeably and widely with the historic Christian tradition's teaching on ethics and with the Protestant confessional legacy, thus grounding their consideration of Scripture in the wisdom of the church's reading of the Scriptures. At some points, I would go in a little different direction from the one that they chart out. For instance, concerning marriage, divorce, and remarriage, my views are those of Westminster Confession of Faith chapter 24, helpfully elaborated by the PCA Study Committee Report on Divorce and Remarriage (1992)—but this does not take away at all from the help and clarity that I get from their treatment of even that topic.

This is a volume that I will use myself and commend to others for use in seminaries, universities, schools, and churches. Pastors, in particular, looking to disciple Christians in order that they would obey all that Jesus has commanded (Matt. 28:20) will be edified and equipped by this volume.

May your careful reading of this book help you to become a more grateful and faithful hearer and doer of God's Word (Matt. 7:24), and so to worship God.

Ligon Duncan
Chancellor and CEO, Reformed Theological Seminary
John E. Richards Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology
Jackson, Mississippi

A Word from Daniel L. Akin

I HAVE BEEN in the world of Christian ministry and education for more than four decades. I have been a part of the Southern Baptist Convention for all my adult life. I have ministered and preached in churches and have taught and led in various schools and institutions of higher learning. I have interacted with men and women from many different denominations and religions, and I have had the privilege of speaking of the name of Christ around the globe. Throughout all these experiences, I have seen evangelism strategies come and go. I have seen religious ideas and fads ascend in popularity and then rapidly decline. I have seen many seasons when particular moral issues have garnered heated attention and then faded from prominence. And I have read many books on ethics that have followed these strategies, addressed the hot topics of the day, been popular for a season, but ultimately disappeared because they lacked staying power.

But amid the flowing tides of culture, the changing demands of ministry circumstances, and the coming and going of various moral debates, some books on ethics remain as 'must-reads.' Over the years of serving our Lord, I have come to realize that a few things must always remain constant and must always anchor our souls to historical orthodoxy: a high view of God, a clear understanding and articulation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and a total commitment to the Great Commission. Books that capture these elements and set them as foundational stones are the books that tend to last and be treasured on the shelves of any worthy library. Because they manage to keep those things that are central to the story they tell, they have the potential to outlast the fads and cultural tides. This is what I believe Mark Liederbach and Evan Lenow have done, and done well, in *Ethics as Worship*.

First, they speak clearly and biblically to many of the pressing issues and concerns of our day. Second, they adeptly shed light on the complexities of these modern moral issues, bringing greater clarity and understanding. Third, they direct us to see the One from whom light comes and then look at the issues with his light. They have reminded us that only in and through Jesus Christ's penal

substitutionary atonement can we be restored to a place where ethics is transformed from mere obedience to joyful worship. Fourth, they have highlighted our desperate need to rely on the Holy Spirit's empowerment to become in practice what God created and redeemed us to be as his image-bearers. Fifth, they have cast the entire ethical endeavor in the context of God's mission to make disciples of every people, tribe, tongue, and nation so that he receives all the glory, praise, honor, and worship that he is due.

This book is not a discourse in dos and don'ts. Nor is it a book about rights and wrongs or goods and evils. While it certainly speaks to these things, this is ultimately a book about God, his worthiness, and the praise that he is due. It is a book about the person and work of Jesus Christ and the whole-life response we ought to have to his wondrous gospel. It is a book that focuses our attention not on our actions, character, or circumstances, but on the wonder of the Holy Trinity and the joys awaiting us as we live in light of God's eternal plan and for his eternal purpose. It is a book about finding our small story caught up in God's eternal and infinite story. It is a book about worship in every waking moment because God is a God worthy of each of those moments.

I have known Mark and Evan for many years. My love and respect for both is difficult to put into words. They walk with integrity and live gospel-saturated lives. I have looked forward to the publication of this work, and now that it is here, I hope and pray that it will become a standard in the field of ethics for years to come—it is that well done. Bravo, brothers! You have served our Savior well in your labor of love."

Daniel L. Akin
President and Professor of Preaching and Theology,
Ed Young Sr. Chair of Preaching,
Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

Preface: Worship and Ethics

"Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."
—1 Corinthians 10:31

"The integrity of Christian ethics is better described as derived from a certain shared faith about the nature of God as Ultimate Reality and man's proper response to him."[1] *—Waldo Beach and H. Richard Niebuhr,* Christian Ethics: Sources of the Living Tradition

Morality: Invented, Proclaimed, or Discovered?

When we are asked what we do for a living, our reply that "we teach ethics" often meets with interesting responses. Some people respond with a puzzled "what's that?" look. Others say, "I'm glad somebody is out there to help set all those lawyers and politicians straight." But an increasing number of folks we interact with express a level of skepticism about the discipline as a whole. One particular interaction highlights much of the attitude that we believe increasingly reflects the moral sentiment of contemporary culture. Several years ago, Mark's wife, Harriette, was getting her hair done by a local stylist. In the course of conversation, the stylist asked, "What does your husband do for a living?" When she replied, "He's a professor of ethics," the stylist immediately (and seriously) responded, "Oh, so he can do whatever he wants and know how to justify it."

Contrast this with what we commonly experience in our introductory ethics classes. Both of us teach ethics at Christian higher education institutions (college and seminary). Our classes are the first introduction to the formal study of ethics that most of our students experience. It is very common for these students

1. Waldo Beach and H. Richard Niebuhr, eds., *Christian Ethics: Sources of the Living Tradition*, 2nd ed. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1973), 5.

to show up with the preconception that *ethics* is just a fancy term for *moralism*. That is, they expect that the class will be some kind of glorified rehashing of rule-keeping—"Don't drink or chew or go with boys or girls who do!"—for college or graduate-school credit. Typically, the novice ethics student has been preconditioned by our evangelical subculture's tendency to package morality into oversimplistic bumper-sticker formulas such as "God said it, I believe it, that settles it."

Both these perspectives demonstrate in their own way why studying ethics is so important. On the one hand, the stylist's reply captures the cultural ethos gaining momentum around the globe: *morality is invented*. From this point of view, the study of ethics is really just a study of preferences and morality is relative to one's own perspective. Whether or not the hairstylist realizes it, an unholy trinity of ideas undermines any sense of ultimate values. The embrace of self-determinism, the commitment to moral autonomy, and an underlying sense of life's meaninglessness lead to an ethic that is nothing more than an ode to personal expression. Tragically, this *morality is invented* perspective is all too often further fueled by a pop psychology that abandons common sense. It is normally accompanied by a demand for absolute "tolerance" of any lifestyle—except, of course, those lifestyles that claim that there is something called *absolute good and evil* or *right and wrong*.

On the other hand, regarding our Christian college and seminary students, while there is a presumption that they hold an underlying belief system tying ethics to a more lasting foundation, too often that foundation is underdeveloped. As a result, the connections between morality, God, and his commands are weak. Thus, while the students do not believe that morality is merely invented, they often perceive—rather tepidly—that *morality is proclaimed*. At first blush, this may not seem like such a bad perspective. At least this perspective begins with respect for the Bible and God's revelation. The problem, rather, relates to an improper view of the God who does the proclaiming. It involves the tendency to relegate the instructions given by God to a domain of systematic legalism and thereby miss both the nature of God and the goodness of his divinely given commands. When people do so, they also misunderstand the deeper purposes of morality, its connection to God's character, the manner in which he created humans to flourish through abiding in the Word, and the deeply ingrained purpose of worship written into the very fabric of the universe.

The unfortunate reality is that these erroneous perceptions inevitably result in the belief that the discipline of ethics is primarily concerned with keeping the rules of a divine taskmaster who functions like an authoritarian school principal (or dean of students). Our duty (and therefore our ethic) is to obey the rules as best we can and hope God either grades on a curve or overlooks our inadequacies. Ethics, then, becomes little more than a rigid structure of behaviorism and a

guilt-inducing accountability system enforced by a divine Judge eager to show us where we have gone wrong.

Interestingly, both these perspectives on ethics are tragically wrong for similar reasons. The former is wrong because of its *radical misdirection* about the shape and purpose of the universe as well as the God who created it. The latter is wrong because of its *anemic and impotent understanding* about the shape and purpose of the universe and the God who created it. Both miss the heart of morality and ethics.

Rightly understood, *morality is a discovery*. It is first and foremost a discovery of the God who is to be treasured above all things. It is a discovery of a God who marvelously spoke the universe into existence. It is a discovery of the One who graciously designed it to function maximally when it is properly centered on him. It is a discovery of the One who came to live, die, and rise again to make it possible to have an abundant life on this planet. And it is a discovery of the Helper who indwells us and empowers us to worship God with all that we are.

Not only is it a discovery of God, but it is also a discovery of the indescribable wonder of what it means to be a human created in God's image and for his purposes. It is a discovery of what it means to be transformed at the depth of our character. It is a discovery of guiding principles, commands, and exhortations that God has revealed to help us maximally live in his world. And it is a discovery of the everlasting opportunity to experience the inexhaustible love of an eternal God and to explore his infinite nature forever into the future.

The Heart of Christian Ethics

The study of ethics, then, is not *primarily* about choices, acts, results, or even obeying the commands of Scripture (though we believe that doing so is crucial). Ethics is about God. It is about maximally adoring him and rendering to him all that he is due from all that he has made. And it is about our doing so both individually and corporately.

It follows that the primary purpose of a rightly framed ethical system must be to direct us in the *whys*, *whats*, and *hows* of rendering unto God all the praise and honor he is due. A rightly framed ethical system must be concerned that we worship maximally in every moment, by every choice and act, from every square inch of his created order, and ideally with every person who ever lives. Not only must it be concerned with our actions, but it must also press us to become the kind of people whose character is so shaped to be like Jesus Christ's that we do these things reflexively, constantly, obediently, lovingly, joyfully, and missionally. This is the heart of Christian ethics.

Simply put, we must live worshipfully because we have become true worshipers. For only such an effort would be worthy of an eternal and infinite God.

Studying ethics is the joyful discovery of what it means to live a life of *worship*. Making this discovery is both the premise and purpose of this book.

What Do We Mean by *Ethics as Worship*?

So what do we mean by the phrase *ethics as worship*? While we will develop the concept more robustly throughout the book, here we offer a brief discussion and definition not only of what worship is but of how it relates to the discipline of ethics.

When modern Christians hear the word *worship*, all too often our thoughts turn primarily to a consideration of the singing that takes place during our Sunday morning church services. While certainly this can be an aspect of what it means to worship, the Bible gives us a much richer and more comprehensive picture. Linguistically speaking, the biblical words most often translated into English as "worship" carry with them the connotations of bowing down or prostrating oneself before God in humility as well as our rendering service to him. For example, in regard to bowing down before God, the Hebrew verb *shachah* (translated in the King James Version ninety-nine times as "worship") literally carries the meaning of bowing down or prostrating oneself in the presence of a superior.[2] Similarly, in the New Testament, the Greek verb *proskuneo* (translated sixty times in the King James Version as "worship") bears the identical idea of kneeling down or prostrating oneself before one of superior rank.[3] In regard to offering our service to God, in the Old Testament the word *'abad* can literally be translated as "work" or "serve" but is also translated as "worship" (see, e.g., Ex. 3:12). Similarly, in the New Testament the Greek word *latreia* is also alternatively translated as "service" or "worship" (Rom. 12:1).

Now, certainly we need to do more than evaluate possible word meanings to establish a firm idea of what these words imply about worship. But we can be sure that it includes humbling oneself before God as well as offering him our services and work as a part of our worship patterns.[4]

If we are not careful, it is also possible to conclude from this word study that proper worship entails only an outward display without ever getting to an interior expression of love for, and faith in, God. But as the greatest commandment clearly states, God desires us to love him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Deut. 6:4–5; Mark 12:28–31). Obviously, then, worship involves more than good works. Mere external behaviors do not capture the total picture.

Therefore, while it is beyond the scope of this introductory chapter to fully

2. Strong's, 7812, https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/hebrew/kjv/shachah.html.

3. Strong's, 4352, https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/kjv/proskuneo.html.

4. Daniel I. Block, *For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 9, 17–18. See also Strong's, 5647, https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/hebrew/nas/abad.html.

develop the following ideas, we believe that worship that is acceptable minimally requires of us five key elements:[5]

1. The correct God must be worshiped (Gen. 1:1; Ex. 3:14; 20:2–3; Matt. 28:18–20; Heb. 1:1–3).
2. Worship must come interiorly from the heart as an expression of thanksgiving and love for God and in response to his grace (Deut. 6:4–5; Mark 12:29–31; John 14:6; Rom. 10:9).
3. Worship must take the proper form as God gives us instruction (John 14:15, 31; Rom. 14:17–18).[6]
4. Worship is comprehensive in nature; it requires all aspects of our selves and our lives (Mark 12:29–31; Rom. 12:1; 1 Cor. 10:31).
5. Worship is both individual and corporate in nature (Heb. 10:24–25; Rev. 4–5).

Put simply, worship requires that we give to the *correct God* (the one true God) all the praise, honor, and glory he is due *from the heart*, as he *instructs*, in *every aspect* of our existence, both *by ourselves and corporately* with all people created in his image.[7] See diagram below (fig. P.1).

In an attempt to pull these ideas together, we offer the following working statement as a baseline for understanding as we move into the chapters that follow:

> Ethics as worship begins with the acknowledgment of the greatness of God's nature and character, his preeminence over all things, and his gracious creation and redemption accomplished through Christ. It is best expressed through the humble, willing, faith-filled, and loving response of image-bearers who submit all aspects of

5. We are indebted here to Daniel Block's work. Though we nuance our definition differently, we would be remiss not to credit him both for the influence that his work has had on our understanding and in relation to the adjoining diagram. See Block, *For the Glory of God*, chap. 1, esp. pp. 9, 17–18, 26.

6. As David Peterson rightly points out, the Bible depicts both acceptable and unacceptable forms of worship (e.g., Rom. 12:1–2; 14:17–18; Heb. 12:28–29; and 13:16 vs. Gen. 4:3–7; Ex. 32; and Isa. 1). He comments that "acceptable worship does not start with human intuition or inventiveness, but with the action of God." He also notes that we cannot simply determine for ourselves what we believe is honoring to God. Instead, acceptable worship "is a matter of responding to God's initiative in salvation and revelation, and doing so in the way that he requires." David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 17, 26, 19.

7. Our English word *worship* (*worth* + *ship*), which literally means "to ascribe worth to something," is an attempt to capture this richness in one word. It carries the connotations of recognizing the worth of something and then responding to that worthiness with a sense of honor, reverence, respect, and adoration. In relation to God, this involves recognizing his infinite and therefore supreme worthiness and thus also making an offering of appropriate response—which in light of his nature requires all that we have, all that we are, and all that we do both individually and corporately.

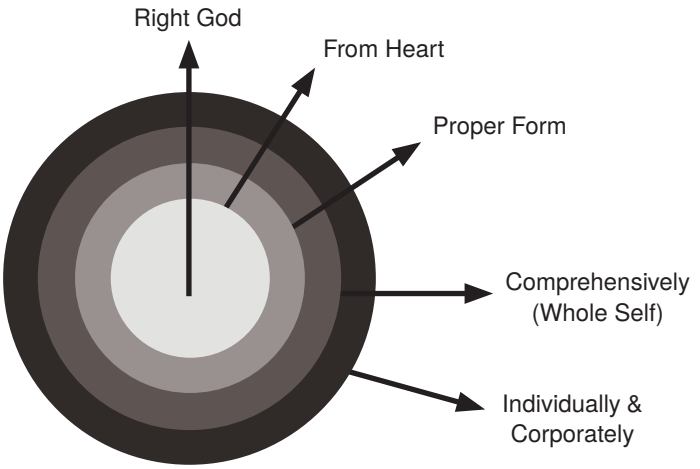

Fig. P.1. Elements of Proper Worship

> themselves (both individually and corporately) to him—on his terms, in all ways, at all times, in all places, for his glory, and in a manner that promotes his fame throughout all creation. It is enabled by grace, engaged in faith, motivated by thanksgiving, pursued in love, guided by Scripture, and empowered by the Spirit, and results in joy.

Building on these premises, we will use Scripture as our inerrant, infallible, and sufficient source of authority to argue that because God is the sovereign and holy King who created all things, he is then also the bright and glorious center of the universe. He is both the source of all things that exist and the ultimate goal for which they exist. Because he is the Lord God Almighty, the way we live and move and have our being (both as individuals and together as a human society) must be determined in light of his majestic nature and its accompanying authority. But most importantly, because God creates and orders the universe out of an eternal love between the three persons of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), the very nature of all things is flavored by God's love, and all things were created and ordered to move in and through the energy of this same eternal love.[8] All that we are and all that we do are meant to be done and ordered through a love toward and unto that which is most lovely—God himself.

We will argue that when rightly formed, a methodology of ethics is:

1. Centered on God and not us.
2. Motivated preeminently, fully, and finally by a virtuous love for God.

8. For a fuller discussion of this rich concept, see Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity: An Introduction to the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012).

3. Shaped by a full obedience to God's commands.
4. Appropriately nuanced in light of the context.
5. Cognizant of anticipated and potential consequences.
6. Sensitive to the impact our moral choices and stances will have on our relationships with fellow image-bearers

God designed ethics to be both a personal and corporate embodiment of a life of worship. Only in and through the saving work of Jesus Christ can the worship of sinners be rightly ordered to God in obedient love now and forevermore. This happens positionally by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, progressively throughout life as the Holy Spirit works cooperatively with us, and in accord with our created nature as image-bearers.

Our purpose and desire is to take our readers with us on an exploration into the nature and character of God, the world he created, and the people he created to steward it in his name. In so doing, we hope to discover together from his Word how best to honor him as God, steward the world he created to flourish, and be the kind of people he created us to be. Our hope is that as we take this journey together, it will become evident that the discipline of ethics requires of us a serious pursuit of and commitment to *discipleship* and *disciple-making*. That is, the practice and embodiment of ethics as worship involve the hard work of disciplining the loves, worship patterns, and practices of image-bearers in every aspect of life such that we become a people who take the gospel and all it entails to the ends of the earth. Ethics as worship requires us to shape our character and discipline our conduct in light of God's mission to make disciples of all nations. Ultimately, it is concerned that all the earth be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Gen. 1:27–28; Hab. 2:14; Matt. 28:18–20).

If there is to be any hope that our students (or any other Christians) can discover the wonder of God and the richness of his plan for their lives, and they in turn can help the local hairstylist (and the countless others who share her worldview) discover this same God, who is the beginning and end of all things, then it is imperative that our students (and all the rest of us) grow in our own understanding of ethics as worship. Further, because God loves the world he created, it is also imperative that every Christian learn to communicate the hope of the gospel and the fullness of ethics as worship from a theological perspective of clarity, conviction, cultural relevance, and joy.

This is both our prayer and our hope.

The Outline of the Book

In order to accomplish our purpose, we have divided the book into four parts. In part 1, we provide a basic introduction to the discipline of ethics in general.

In chapter 1, we discuss the personal and cultural relevance of studying ethics, demonstrate the importance of understanding how underlying worldview assumptions affect one's perspective on the prevailing moral issues of the day, introduce the concepts of metaethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics as the necessary elements to develop a well-formed ethical system, and then identify the distinctive nature of a particularly Christian ethic.

In part 2, we develop the biblical and theological foundations (metaethics) for ethics as worship by exploring the metanarrative of Scripture through a fourfold paradigm of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. We also explore what Jesus means by stating that God is looking for worshipers who worship him "in spirit and truth" (John 4:23–24). This part of the book reflects our conviction that the Bible guides proper worship by first revealing an underlying metaphysical reality about the way things *are* (*revealed reality*). Further, we believe that it is only after one identifies and understands this underlying design and moral structure that a discussion of normative ethics—the way things ought to *be*, and what we must *do*—can rightly take place (*revealed morality*).

In chapter 2, we focus our attention on Genesis 1–2 as the primary text from which to develop the creation portions of the biblical narrative. Our goal is to highlight the theocentric nature of all reality, the created design of human beings as God's image-bearers, and the nature of human beings as both worshipers and a people on mission to shape the entire cosmos to maximize the glory of God. Chapter 3 continues the discussion by exploring the reality of human sin and the fall, God's gracious work to redeem and reclaim the fallen world, and the Lord's work to restore his people to their original design and intended purpose. In particular, our interest is to develop the ethical implications not only of Christ's *saving* work but also of the *restoration* to abundant life and eternal hope that accompanies that saving work and that takes place through the process of discipleship and disciple-making.

In keeping with this, the following two chapters develop Jesus' teaching about true worshipers who "worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:23–24). Our purpose here is to highlight the *means* by which God intends to empower and guide his people to maximize his glory through their ethical choices and behaviors. These two chapters serve as a bridge between our metaethical discussion and the development of our normative ethical method. Chapter 4 focuses on the role that the Holy Spirit plays in the ethical formation and virtuous character development of a Christian disciple. The focus here is on the shaping within the believer of a "heart of worship" that is rightly ordered to God and that is reflexively active in the life of a believer. This naturally moves into a discussion in chapter 5 of why the Bible as the "Word of God" must be the Christian's primary source of truth and thus the chief and final authority for ethics, moral formation, and moral decision-making.

In this chapter, we emphasize that it is Jesus, the "Word of God," who through the Holy Spirit gives us Scripture as the "Word of God" such that we might be able to shape our behaviors and character in accord with God's eternal wisdom and the moral design.

Whereas the concern of part 2 of the book is to understand metaethics through what Scripture tells us about the way that things are (*revealed reality*), the focus of part 3 is to understand and develop a normative ethical method (*revealed morality*). In chapters 6 and 7, which should be read as a single unit, we pull together the biblical and theological ideas discovered in the previous chapters to assemble the normative methodological structure of ethics as worship. We begin by first recognizing the key link between our stated beliefs and loves and our actual practices. We then identify six domains of ethical assessment that factor into every moral situation, illustrate how various moral theories emerge when any one of these domains is made the primary or exclusive element in moral evaluation, discuss the biblical precedence for considering each domain, and describe how they should be employed together as a normative pattern for ethical decision-making.

In chapter 8, we bring closure to the normative part of the book by dealing with the problem of moral dilemmas. We recognize that while in an ideal world the process of shaping character and identifying moral norms should lead us directly from an understanding of the commands of Scripture to a flawless application in the context of life and practice, in a fallen world such application is often very difficult. Our discussion in this chapter, then, focuses on how to make ethical decisions that worship and glorify God when it appears that we can do so only by breaking the commands of God or choosing a "lesser evil." We use the story of Rahab from Joshua 2 as the foundational text for this discussion.

Finally, in part 4, our discussion moves from the metaethical foundations developed in part 2 and the normative methodology developed in part 3 to a discussion of how the concepts developed in ethics as worship relate to decision-making regarding particular issues we face in contemporary life and society. Chapter 9 serves as a bridge from our normative method to our application. The point of discussion is the concept of justice and a discovery of how best to think about justice in the social context in which we all seek to live out our ethical convictions. A key point of the chapter highlights the fact that all ethical issues involve a quest for biblical justice. This doctrinal point is a particularly important notion to clarify in light of the contemporary confusion and division that exist among evangelicals regarding the term and concept of *social justice*. For some, the term simply expresses God's heart for societies to reflect his just character in and through their laws and social systems. For others, the term and concept is inextricably linked to liberal/Marxist agendas. We seek to clarify the language

and concepts in order to avoid unfortunate misrepresentation of how the gospel of Jesus Christ relates to the issues of seeking justice in the society of humanity as God desires.

Chapters 10–12 then focus on three particular issues related to gospel-centered justice: race, wealth and poverty, and creation care. Chapters 13–16 focus on issues most commonly described as relating to life and death (capital punishment, war, abortion, euthanasia). Chapters 17–19, finally, focus on issues most commonly described as relating to marriage and sexuality (biblical sexuality and disordered sexuality, divorce and remarriage, and contraception, birth control, and reproductive technologies).

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Abbreviations

AID	artificial insemination donor
AIH	artificial insemination husband
APA	American Psychological Association
ART	assisted reproductive technology
BDAG	Frederick William Danker et al., eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000)
BibSac	*Bibliotheca Sacra*
CDC	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
CMDA	Christian Medical & Dental Associations
ET	embryo transfer
GA	graded absolutism
GIFT	gamete intrafallopian transfer
HA	humble absolutism
IA	ideal absolutism
IUD	intrauterine device
IUI	intrauterine insemination
IVF	in vitro fertilization
JAMA	*Journal of the American Medical Association*
JBMW	*Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*
JETS	*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
MCR	*Military Chaplains' Review*
NAC	New American Commentary
NASB	New American Standard Bible

NCA	nonconflicting absolutism
NEJM	*New England Journal of Medicine*
NKJV	New King James Version
PAS	physician-assisted suicide
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
SBJT	*Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*
SWJT	*Southwestern Journal of Theology*
WCF	Westminster Confession of Faith
WLC	Westminster Larger Catechism

PART 1

An Introduction to Ethics

1

What Is Christian Ethics?

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. . . . You shall love your neighbor as yourself." —Jesus Christ, Mark 12:30–31

"Biblical ethics begins with God and ends with him."[1] *—Waldo Beach and H. Richard Niebuhr,* Christian Ethics: Sources of the Living Tradition

The Central Importance of Ethics: Life's Most Enduring Questions

Gay marriage and gender identity, global warming and environmental stewardship, capital punishment and war, racism and poverty, abortion, euthanasia, and physician-assisted suicide. All these topics reside at the center of society's most intense debates. And they are all issues of morality and ethics.

The fact that questions of morality and ethics play such a crucial role in society should not surprise us. Indeed, it would not be hard to argue that humanity's most enduring questions have always been "How should I live my life?" and "How should we live our lives together?" For this reason, some twenty-five hundred years ago, Socrates famously stated that the "unexamined life isn't worth living."[2] He knew then what is still evident today—that moral clarity is required for human fulfillment.

Socrates has not been alone in his desire to link the value and shape of our lives to a deeper purpose. Indeed, some of the most influential thinkers in history—Plato, Aristotle, Moses, Confucius, Buddha, Jesus, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Hobbes, Kant, Mill, and Nietzsche—all in their own way admonished

1. Waldo Beach and H. Richard Niebuhr, eds., *Christian Ethics: Sources of the Living Tradition*, 2nd ed. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1973), 15.

2. Plato, *Apology*, 38a, in *A Plato Reader: Eight Essential Dialogues*, ed. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2012).

their followers to examine themselves and the choices they make in life. Each offered answers to the questions "How should I live my life?" and "How should we live our lives together?" Simply put, for the vast majority of human history, some of the greatest efforts of religious, philosophical, and sociopolitical inquiry have revolved around the quest for meaning and morality. That is, they have revolved around ethics.

Obviously, then, ethics is an extremely important and relevant discipline of study. It is in the realm of ethics that we not only explore *how* we should live, but also examine—as Socrates admonished—the reasons *why* we (as individuals or society) choose to live the way we do. How one arrives at an answer to these questions, how one justifies the answers, and how one seeks to apply them in his or her own daily life (and how society does so as a whole) is the concern of the discipline of ethics.

For this reason, the purpose of this first chapter is to introduce the foundational questions and concepts necessary to properly understand the discipline of ethics with a particular emphasis on *Christian* ethics. Three questions guide our discussion:

1. What are worldviews, and how are they foundational to morality and ethics?
2. What is the relationship between a person's worldview and how one practices ethics?
3. What are the distinguishing marks of Christian ethics?

What Are Worldviews, and How Are They Foundational to Morality and Ethics?

Is Morality Invented or Discovered?

Whether we know it or not, all of us have already adopted a moral and ethical framework. When one considers the list of topics that reside at the center of cultural debate, not only are personal preferences and liberties on the line, but so also are tax dollars, cultural norms, and national policies. Indeed, the blood of armies is ultimately spilled over convictions about right and wrong, good and evil.

This is why it is critically important to recognize that the study of ethics does not concern itself with the question whether it is appropriate to legislate morality. The question is not *whether* we should legislate morality, but always *whose morality are we going to legislate?* At a fundamental level, every decision related to human behavior—from putting up a speed-limit sign on a road (in order to protect and save lives) to providing legal recognition for people of the same gender to marry—is a reflection and assertion of some moral point of view. Indeed, human society itself is by default a form of corporately legislated morality.

It follows that if we are going to live according to one morality or another, then questions of justification not only must be taken seriously, but need to be moved to the center of the debate. That is, we are going to have to decide why one moral theory or vision is superior or preferable to another.

This is, in fact, why Socrates admonished his followers to examine themselves. Having good reasons to justify why one has chosen to live as one has is a part of what it means to live wisely. But the choice of why one might live one way versus another requires us to consider what reasons justify or legitimize any particular moral system over and above another. Ethical examination is necessary if one desires to actually live a life worth living.

Perhaps the most direct way to begin this examination is to ask, "Where does morality come from?" or "What is the source of morality?" For example, if morality is simply *invented*, then persons and societies are free to choose whatever relative values they want. Ultimately, there is no absolute standard of right and wrong, good or evil. Rather, the roots of our morality are grown in the soil of personal choice, public values, cultural likes or dislikes, political agreement, or authoritarian power. Moral authority resides in the individual's conscience, in the collective thought of a culture, or in the will of a society's most powerful agents. Morality is fluid, right and wrong are merely sentiments, and ethical systems are a matter of convention.

If morality is *discovered*, then a completely different set of ideas and grounding assumptions come into play regarding the formation of personal and cultural morality. If morality is discovered, then this means that there exists an objective standard that is not dependent on human ingenuity or whim. Rather, there is a moral authority independent of humans to which all will be held accountable. And for this reason, then, wisdom directs each of us individually—and the human race as a whole—to use all our strength and ingenuity to discover it.

Further, if there is an objective standard of moral behavior that can be discovered and to which we are all beholden, then it certainly follows that we would be wise to ask whether that standard was put in place by God. If so, then it follows that the God who made the world and designed us to live in it knows how we ought to best live our lives and maximally flourish in his creation. Obviously, then, this debate about the source and justification of morality has much to do with the question of God. While it is possible to build an ethical system on the assumption that God does not exist, the question of God's existence (or not) plays a central role in the examination of a life worth living. If he does exist, then building an ethical system on the assumption that he does not would be the extreme example of human foolishness and arrogance. This is why the question of God and his existence (and how it is answered) will always play a key role in the formation of any and all ethical systems.

Either way, something profound should come into focus as we pursue this line of reasoning. That is, whether or not one realizes it, the opinions, values, and ideas that *anyone* holds regarding *any* moral issue ultimately rest on some underlying assumptions about God, what the world is like, and how one believes morality should be legislated. There are no morally neutral points of view. Our opinions about morality and moral issues do not arise from a vacuum. Whether someone can clearly state his or her underlying assumptions has little to do with the fact that such assumptions are there. At some level, consciously or unconsciously, deeper assumptions and ideas about God and the nature of the world drive competing visions of morality.

What Is a Worldview?

The name typically given to these "deeper assumptions" and foundational beliefs is *worldview*. It is vitally important to understand that *everyone* has a worldview—even if he or she does not know it, does not realize it, or is unable to articulate it. Indeed, this is the very thing that Socrates was trying to push his followers to understand when he admonished them to examine themselves. While he did not use the term *worldview*, Socrates understood that everyone's moral choices are in some very important way connected to—and directed by—one's underlying assumptions, beliefs, or affinities. This is why they *must* be examined. If someone wants to live a life that is worth living, then he or she must dig down deep and take a closer look to see whether the choices being made actually align with what is held in the highest esteem or believed to be most important. From a Christian point of view, this idea is carried even further. It is important not only to be *aware* of one's worldview assumptions but also to examine oneself to see whether these foundational loves and ideas actually *align with what God reveals about himself and the way he ordered the world*. As the apostle Paul exhorts believers in 2 Corinthians 13:5: "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves!"

The term *worldview* was first introduced into philosophical discussion through the work of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), who employed the German word *Weltanschauung* to capture the idea of how our minds function in light of a deeper abiding sense, understanding, or "intuition of the world" around us.[3] Then, as David Naugle demonstrates, the concept was brought into Christian philosophy and parlance in the late 1800s primarily through the initial work and influence of James Orr (1844–1913) and Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920).[4] According to Orr, a *Weltanschauung* (or, as it was translated into English, *worldview*) functions as "the

3. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment: Including the First Introduction*, trans. and intro. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 111–12.

4. David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of the Concept* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 5–25.

widest view that the mind can take of things in the effort to grasp them together as a whole from the standpoint of some particular philosophy or theology."[5] For Kuyper, it represented a "life-system" that involved a "comprehensive vision of reality engendering the worship of God and submission to His will in all things."[6]

Regardless of its origins, the importance of understanding this "comprehensive vision" or "life-system" by which to "understand the whole" cannot be overstated. Worldviews are vitally important for shaping and orienting how each of us lives and functions in the world. As Al Wolters explains:

> A worldview, even when it is half unconscious and unarticulated, functions like a compass or road map. It orients us in the world at large, gives us a sense of what is up and what is down, what is right and what is wrong in the confusion of events and phenomena that confronts us. Our worldview shapes, to a significant degree, the way we assess the events, issues, and structures of our civilization and our times.[7]

We understand a worldview to involve all parts of the self in the manner in which we perceive our world. This includes not only our minds but also our loves and wills. Thus, we define *worldview* as a *conceptual framework made up of our fundamental beliefs and loves that then functions as the means by which we perceive, interpret, and judge reality and that also drives how we behave in it*. Metaphorically, it might be helpful to think of a large jigsaw puzzle. Each of our lives has thousands of little pieces: choices, ideas, contexts, loves, interests, people, emotions, and situations that we face each day. We are constantly working to "put it all together" in a coherent fashion. But how difficult is it to put together a massive puzzle with no comprehensive picture to help guide how we ought to put each piece into its proper place? Thus, a worldview functions much as the puzzle's box top in that it is meant to serve as a guide in order to see, orient, and then place each piece in the proper position.

It is commonly held that a worldview is primarily concerned with only the rational part of the self and functions solely in the realm of ideas, truth claims, or

5. James Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World as Centering in the Incarnation* (Edinburgh: Andrew Eliot, 1893), 3.

6. Naugle, *Worldview*, 17; see also David K. Naugle, "Worldview: History, Theology, Implications," 8, http://www3.dbu.edu/naugle/pdf/WV-HistyTheolImplications.pdf. Naugle also cites the work of R. D. Henderson, "How Abraham Kuyper Became a Kuyperian," *Christian Scholars Review* 22, no. 1 (1992): 22, 34–35. Kuyper's discussion can be found in Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931), 11. Kuyper particularly addresses this in his first lecture, "Calvinism a Life-System." See http://www.reformationalpublishingproject.com/pdf_books/scanned_books_pdf/lecturesoncalvinism.pdf.

7. Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 5.

stated beliefs.[8] But in agreement with St. Augustine, we affirm that "when there is a question as to whether a man is good, one does not ask what he believes, or what he hopes, but what he loves."[9] Human beings are both rational and affective. They both think and desire. Both elements are crucial to understanding human choices, behaviors, and character, and ultimately how each person will embody these things in and through the person's morality and ethics. Because our loves are so central to the people we are and the choices we make, it is imperative to recognize the connection of our affections and desires to our worldview and consequently our moral choices. James Sire rightly notes that a worldview is "a fundamental orientation of the heart."[10]

It is appropriate, therefore, to understand that a person's worldview relates not only to the rational part of the self or the mind, but also to the affective or desiring parts of the self. David Naugle captures this idea well when he points out that a worldview involves a "vision of God, the universe, our world, and ourselves rooted and grounded in the embodied human heart as the seat and source of our worship and spirituality, ideas and beliefs, loves and affections, and decisions and actions."[11] Since worldviews relate to the whole self, the shaping of a worldview must involve the formation of the whole self—heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:29–31).

Five Components of a Worldview

In his book *Life's Ultimate Questions*, Ronald Nash identifies five components or "clusters of beliefs" that form a person's worldview. These involve what a person believes to be true about metaphysics, epistemology, anthropology, theology, and axiology.[12] Each one plays a significant role in how each of us understands the

8. See, for example, James K. A. Smith's otherwise outstanding book *Desiring the Kingdom*, in which he identifies a worldview primarily in terms of "beliefs, ideas, and doctrines" and relegates it to the realm of gaining information. James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 17–18. Indeed, it is easy to see how one might reach such a conclusion, considering the influential definition of *worldview* from such excellent scholars as J. P. Moreland, who writes: "A person's worldview contains two important features. First, it includes the set of beliefs the person accepts, especially those about important matters such as reality, God, value, knowledge and so on. But a worldview is more than just a set of beliefs. . . . A worldview includes the rational structure that occurs among the set of beliefs that constitute it." J. P. Moreland, *Kingdom Triangle: Recover the Christian Mind, Renovate the Soul, Restore the Spirit's Power* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 33.

9. Augustine, *Enchiridion*, CXVII. See *The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Love* (Washington, DC: Regnery Gateway, 1961), 135.

10. James Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 4th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 17.

11. David K. Naugle, "Worldview: Definitions, History, and the Importance of the Topic," 4, http://www3.dbu.edu/naugle/pdf/Worldview_defhistconceptlect.pdf.

12. Ronald H. Nash, *Life's Ultimate Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 14–15. Nash actually uses the word *ethics* for his fifth component, but we have opted for the term

world in which we live, why we love the things we do, and consequently how we choose to act in the world. So they are vitally important for understanding the discipline of ethics.

Metaphysics has to do with how one understands the nature of reality. It has to do with questions about first things and being. That is, it is an inquiry into how things come into existence, as well as an exploration of a thing's essential nature. It seeks to answer questions such as these: Is there a God? Is the universe all there is? Is there such a thing as a spiritual realm? How did the universe come into existence? Are miracles possible?

Epistemology is the study of the theory of knowledge. It deals primarily with how one can know and what one claims to know. It seeks to answer questions such as these: Can we have accurate knowledge of the world we live in? Are there ideas that are objectively true, or is all knowledge merely opinion? Can we trust our senses? Can we trust our conscience? Is there a connection between faith and reason?

Anthropology considers what it means to be human. When we speak of anthropology in the realm of medicine, we might think of studying the biological systems of human beings, such as the circulatory system and the nervous system. But when we speak of anthropology as it relates to worldviews, we are looking into the nature of human beings in a different way. In regard to ethics, we are concerned with questions such as these: What can we know about human nature? Are human beings made up of anything more than clustered molecules? Do human beings have souls? If so, how do the body and soul interact? Do humans have free will? Does death conclude our existence, or do humans live on in an afterlife?

Theology has to do with the study of the nature of God. Whereas metaphysics asks whether God exists, theology is concerned with questions such as these: If God exists, what is God like? Is there one God or many? Is God a personal being or a powerful life force? Did God cause the universe and design it? If God is a personal being, what attributes does he have? Does God reveal himself to humans? If so, how?

Finally, when we speak of *axiology* as a component of a worldview, we explore why and how we value things as we do. More specifically, we are examining why and how we value moral choices and actions as we do. Here the questions relate to whether there are actions that are objectively or universally right or wrong or whether things are inherently good, evil, or neutral. If there is such a thing as right or wrong, good or evil, in what way is an individual human responsible to know and act in light of these realities? To what degree are human societies responsible

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axiology ("the study of value") to avoid confusion when drawing a distinction between worldview components and our overall project in *Ethics as Worship*.

to uphold goodness and justice? For example, if a person were asked to give an opinion on abortion or homosexuality, the answer would relate directly to the person's underlying beliefs or assumptions held about the nature of morality. Or, for a second example, one might ask whether someone such as Adolf Hitler should have been held morally accountable for his actions in World War II. If so, why? How? On what authority? By what standard? Moral inquiry is concerned with whether someone's opinions are just personal preferences, are culturally held preferences, or are in alignment with objective moral facts.

Now, while it is possible and appropriate to identify and speak of each of these worldview components or areas of belief separately, it is better to consider them as overlapping and interacting categories of ideas and beliefs. In some ways, each of these areas or clusters of beliefs is dependent on the others. For example, a person's belief about what God is like (theology) is dependent on whether God exists (metaphysics) and how we might know that he does exist (epistemology). Likewise, to understand whether abortion is wrong or gay marriage is permissible, one would have to engage not only the category of ethics but also the nature of human persons (anthropology), whether God would be pleased about it (theology), and how we might know those answers (epistemology). Thus, while we can conceive of them separately, and while we can discuss them separately, it is in holding them together that we best recognize the fundamental role they play in shaping our thoughts and desires (beliefs and loves). This brings us directly to the question of how worldviews and ethics are related.

Table 1.1. Five Components of a Worldview

Metaphysics	Inquiry into the nature of reality
Epistemology	Study of knowledge: how we know things
Anthropology	Study of the nature of human beings
Theology	Study of the nature and character of God
Axiology	Inquiry into the nature and practice of good and evil/right and wrong

What Is the Relationship between Worldviews and Ethics?

To understand the relationship between worldviews and ethics, we must first make a distinction between the terms *morality* and *ethics*. While these words have important areas of overlap and are sometimes even used interchangeably, there is actually an important difference. In *An Introduction to Biblical Ethics*, David W. Jones makes the point nicely:

> The word *ethics*, which comes from the Greek term *ethos*, is a broad term that refers to a manner of living. The word *morals*, which is derived from the Latin word *mos*, is a more focused term that is used in reference to specific customs, habits, or conduct. In other words, ethics emphasizes an entire belief system and gives a general perspective; morality emphasizes individual acts and gives specific principles.[13]

As it is normally used, *morality* relates to the prevailing values of a given culture and refers more to the particular acts or behaviors of a person or people in a given context or situation. As Scott Rae simply puts it, "Technically, morality refers to the actual *content* of right and wrong, and ethics refers to the process *of determining*, or discovering, right and wrong."[14]

Table 1.2. Ethics and Morality

Ethics	Morality
The reasons I do something	What I actually do
Asks questions such as: 1. Why should I do this? 2. Are there binding rules? 3. Where do the rules originate? 4. What type of person do I want to be? 5. How do I determine right versus wrong, good versus evil?	Asks questions such as: 1. What should I do? 2. What are the rules? 3. What behavior is expected or required? 4. What can I do to become a good person? 5. What do most people do?

When one studies *ethics*, therefore, one is attempting to go deeper and to discover and develop a foundational, systematic, and applied understanding of the nature of morality. This involves asking *why*, *what*, and *how* questions about morality:

- Why do we believe something to be moral?
- What standards of behavior or character traits are morally valuable, and what are the methods for employing them?
- How do we actually apply them in real-life contexts?

When rightly developed, the study of ethics is concerned with understanding how these elements ought to relate to, and inform, one another. Typically, ethicists divide the field into three branches or subcategories that specifically relate to these

13. David W. Jones, *An Introduction to Biblical Ethics* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013), 5–6.
14. Scott B. Rae, *Moral Choices: An Introduction to Ethics*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 19–20.

why, *what*, and *how* questions. These are *metaethics*, *normative ethics*, and *applied ethics*, respectively.[15]

Metaethics

Metaethics is the subfield in the discipline of ethics that focuses on the question *why?* It is foundational and thus the most important subfield of ethics because it seeks to discover and establish the origin and basis by which one might assess something to be right or wrong, good or evil. It is concerned with discovering or establishing the basic grounding or justification for claiming why one view of morality should be accepted as superior (or at least preferred) to another.[16] Ultimately, it provides the moral motivation or *why* that drives or undergirds how one chooses to live, act, and behave in the world.

Thus, in the discipline of ethics, when one discusses the idea of developing a metaethical foundation, he or she is at the most foundational level using the same categories that shape a person's worldview. As Benjamin Wiker describes it, "Every distinct view of the universe, every theory about nature, necessarily entails a view of morality; every distinct view of morality, every theory about human nature, necessarily entails a cosmology [or worldview] to support it."[17] One's underlying worldview assumptions about metaphysics, epistemology, anthropology, theology, and axiology shape our deepest beliefs and our metaethical point of view and therefore the entirety of our personal moral decision-making process.

Fig. 1.1. Metaethics

15. In addition to these three, two other branches of ethics should be mentioned: *descriptive ethics* and *professional ethics*. The concern of descriptive ethics is not to identify how people *ought* to act, think, or value things but simply to identify and report how people *do* act. It is, then, very similar to the discipline of sociology in its descriptive contribution to recognizing how individuals and societies act, think, or value things. The concern of professional ethics is identifying the personal or corporate standards or guidelines that are established within a particular profession or field of industry that should guide behavior within that sector of society.

16. James Fieser, *Metaethics, Normative Ethics, and Applied Ethics: Historical and Contemporary Readings* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2000), 1. For a related discussion, see Louis P. Pojman, *Ethics: Discovering Right and Wrong* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1990), 2.

17. Benjamin Wiker, *Moral Darwinism: How We Became Hedonists* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 22.

Unfortunately, *metaethics* is typically the area most neglected in a person's system of morality because it involves deeper theological and philosophical thinking and development. Metaethics requires the hard work of constructing a thorough understanding of the five components of one's worldview identified above, and a careful evaluation and ordering of one's ideas and beliefs as they relate to each component. It is our conviction that developing a biblically informed and consistent metaethical framework is the most important element in becoming an ethical person. This is so because when one has a properly formed personal metaethics, it provides the basis for justifying one's normative standards, which in turn can and ought to lead to consistent moral application. Though difficult, we believe Socrates would tell us that it is through examining one's metaethical foundations that one can have a life worth living. More importantly, we believe it is the foundational piece to understanding what Jesus described as the "abundant life." For it is what we believe and love at the deepest levels of ourselves that will give rise to why and how we do the things we ultimately decide to do.

When a person has a well-developed metaethics (worldview), it enables him or her to:

1. Understand the *whys* that undergird the drive toward character formation and moral decision-making.
2. Have the conviction necessary to explain and hold on to the person's moral standards through the various contours of daily life.
3. Develop a moral perspective that is consistent across a broad spectrum of moral issues.

Normative Ethics

While having a clear and consistent metaethical foundation is vital for understanding the *whys* of ethics, by itself metaethics does not directly translate into clarity on how one should behave in the various moral situations we face each day. A fully orbed moral system must also articulate *what* beliefs and convictions arise from those *whys*. The next step in ethics is to develop a *normative theory* consisting of guidelines, or *norms*, to order one's character and behaviors in a manner consistent with one's underlying metaethical framework or worldview.

Because morality is concerned with the kind of person we become in both our character and our behavior, normative ethics seeks to identify and articulate norms that shape both what kind of people we seek to become and what kinds of things we should do. It is concern with character and actions, being and doing. Ethicists often refer to development of norms of character with terms such as *virtue*, *righteousness*, and *godliness*. They refer to norms of behavior with terms such as *rules*, *principles*, and *commands*. From a distinctly Christian point of view,

the goal in normative ethics is to develop our character such that we become "conformed to the image of [Christ]" (Rom. 8:29b). The path toward developing a person who is conformed to the image of Christ is through obedience to Christ's commands. Character arises from obedience. *Normative ethics*, then, is the name given to the subfield of ethics that is concerned primarily with the systematic identification and development of the virtues and norms necessary to shape morally good character and guide morally right decision-making in light of the circumstances, consequences, and relationships present in a given context.

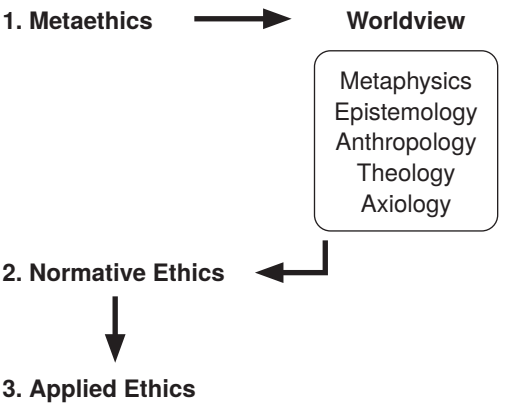

Fig. 1.2. Normative Ethics

Applied Ethics

Finally, while metaethics provides clarity on why we regard certain things as morally good and right and others as evil and wrong, and normative ethics provides a system of norms to guide character development and moral decision-making, one still needs to know how to act in a given situation. The subfield of *applied ethics* seeks to move from theory to action in a particular context. Applied ethics moves us from the deeper *whys* discovered in metaethics through the *whats* of normative ethics to answer this question: "How am I (or are we) to behave in this particular situation?"

In sum, if we think of living the ethical life as a journey that God invites us to enjoy with him, we could think of *metaethics* as our ethical compass, *normative ethics* as our map, and *applied ethics* as the places and events we experience along the journey. The *whys* shape the *whats*, which in turn inform the *hows*. From an evangelical perspective, the only way to give sure guidance about how one should act is by appealing to deeper realities about the way that God ordered the world and what his instructions are for how best to live in it. Since difficult situations requiring ethical insight are often unpredictable, the best time to study ethics and develop this kind of moral clarity is before one faces a challenging situation.

Consider the following case study to understand how each of these subfields comes into play in a real-life situation. Suppose that during your sophomore year of college, two of your friends who have been dating for the past eleven months come to you and tell you that they just found out they are pregnant. They are scared and uncertain what to do, and ask you if you think they should get an abortion. What should you do? What advice should you give?

This case demonstrates the importance of having well-founded and clear convictions at the deepest levels of one's worldview (metaethics). The natural flow and ordering of these three subfields of ethics should guide you as you give your friends help and advice. Ideally, you would have taken the time to discover and develop foundational metaethical beliefs and convictions about why certain things are right or wrong, good or evil. Also, you would have explored things such as God's design and purposes for sexuality, the nature of human life and its inherent value, the true nature of human flourishing, and the value of trusting and obeying God in hard places. Then from these foundational convictions, you would have explored and identified moral norms of behavior to guide your advice as well as the moral character to give the advice with an attitude of faith, hope, and love. From this normative ethic you would be able to move with wisdom and confidence into the vitally important task not only of advising these dear friends how to make the right decision, but also of helping them live with the consequences of choosing to honor God and protecting the innocent life of the child even in such a life-altering circumstance. See table 1.3 below.

Table 1.3. Subfields of Ethics

Subfield of Ethics	Driving Question	Foundational Answer	Metaphor
Metaethics (worldview)	*Why* is something right or wrong, good or evil?	Human beings are image-bearers, and therefore their lives are sacred from the moment of conception to the point of death.	Compass
Normative Ethics	*What* norms of behavior or character should guide the way I should behave right and be good and avoid behaving wrong or becoming evil?	Love God and neighbor (Mark 12:29–31). You shall not murder (Ex. 20:13).	Map
Applied Ethics	*How* do I apply the norms of behavior and character in the real-life situations and contexts I face?	Honor the Lord, the baby, and yourselves by not having an abortion.	Journey

All of us are still in the process of moral development. Jesus Christ is the only morally perfect human being to have ever lived. For the rest of us, being and becoming an ethical person involves a long process of growth and maturing in real-life contexts in which obedience is sometimes hard—but still best. Indeed, this reality highlights the very reason it is so important to study ethics. Not only does it help us answer the centrally important questions "How should I live my life?" and "How should we live our lives together?," it helps us have confidence that Socrates would affirm that ours is both a well-examined life and thus a life worth living.

What Are the Distinguishing Marks of Christian Ethics?

If having a consistent, well-formed ethical system is all that is necessary to receive the blessing of Socrates, why is it important to study Christian ethics? What is a particularly *Christian* ethic? What makes it distinctive?

To answer these questions, it is important to understand that one does not need to be religious or believe in God to develop or live by a system of ethics. It is possible to live an internally consistent life with the basic assumptions that God does not exist. Indeed, history is littered with examples of ethical thinkers and ethical methods that do not rely on the existence of God or his revelation for the formulation of any part of their ethical systems. Epicurus, David Hume, and Friedrich Nietzsche are all examples of men who developed ethical systems that expressly denied either God's existence or the ability for human beings to have clear guidance from God in determining how best to live life. In each case, the thinker's ethical system was meticulously developed and internally consistent from the metaethical foundations to the point of application.

While it is possible to have a system of ethics that is logically coherent and internally consistent without a religious foundation or appeal to God, coherence and consistency alone do not necessarily mean that the ethical system is either good or right. One could have a belief that the moon is made of cheese and develop an internally coherent and consistent plan to mine the moon for cheese. But if the moon is not made of cheese, then the coherence and consistency of the plan make little difference in the grand scheme of things. It is only when our metaethical foundations are *rightly* ordered in accord with ultimate reality, when our normative convictions are *properly* formed in accord with God's moral revelation, and when our method of application *has as its end the worship and glorification of God* that we can rest in the faith and hope that we are following Jesus on the path to the abundant life. The goal of Christian ethics is not to receive Socrates' blessing, but God's.

What are the distinguishing marks of Christian ethics? While many could

be listed, we believe the following six elements particularly distinguish Christian ethics from all other systems of ethics.

The Christocentric Nature of Christian Ethics

The first and most important distinguishing element is ethics' Christocentric nature. Christian ethics is not merely an alternative system of ethics that one can pick and choose from among a vast array of options. Christian ethics is *Christian* precisely because it recognizes the unique nature of the second person of the Trinity, who became incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ in order to live a perfect and sinless life, die to make penal substitutionary atonement for sinners, and rise again as the conquering King who triumphed over death and hell, so that he could be the Savior of all who will call on his name. The person Jesus, not just his moral teaching, is the essential center point and focus in Christian ethics. The entire ethical task must be pursued with an explicit reference to him as the orienting principle of all elements of the ethical endeavor from start to finish.

- Christ is the *beginning and ground of ethics* because he is the principal agent of creation who, in accord with the Father and the Holy Spirit, designed and oriented all things to the glory of God (Gen. 1:1; Col. 1:16).
- Christ is the *means of ethics* because after human beings sinned and fell short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23), he makes it possible to live the abundant life that we are created for through his death and resurrection as well as his teachings that guide our restoration (5:8).
- Christ is the *end and consummation of ethics* because he is the object of love, obedience, emulation, and worship as well as the One to whom we will be conformed when we finally meet him face to face (1 John 3:2).

Response of Thanksgiving Not a Means to Salvation

In light of the fact that Jesus is the answer to the *why*, *what*, and *how* questions of ethics, it is good and right to also recognize, second, that the entire discipline of Christian ethics differs from all other ethical systems in that it is not a means to salvation but a response of thanksgiving and love in light of Christ's saving work. Indeed, in the shadow of the cross, the ethical endeavor changes from a mere method for guiding behavior to an ethic that entails rendering all of ourselves, in all areas of life, at all times unto God in a posture of gratitude.[18]

This thanksgiving-motivated reorientation, then, properly involves:

18. For a very helpful discussion on the importance of gratitude as a core motivation for ethics, see Douglas B. Ponder, "Thanks Be to God: Exploring the Nature and Place of Gratitude in Christian Ethics" (ThM thesis, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020), 59.

- A combination of right thinking *about* and genuine love *for* God (metaethics);
- Good and right behavior properly ordered in us *by* God (normative ethics); and
- Living life in the context of all life situations *unto* God (applied ethics).

To say it another way, Christians who are properly motivated by thankfulness step from *orthodoxy* into *orthopraxy* for the purpose of *doxology*. Rightly formed and ordered beliefs (orthodoxy) give rise to rightly formed and ordered principles of life and practice (orthopraxy). These principles then shape good and virtuous disciples who live out their lives in God-glorifying thanksgiving and praise (doxology).

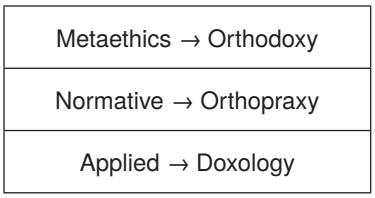

Fig. 1.3. Ethics as a Response of Thanksgiving

Scripturally Ordered

A third distinguishing mark of Christian ethics is its commitment to Scripture as the primary source of authority. Whenever a person makes a moral choice, he or she will have knowingly or unknowingly done so on the basis of an appeal to a source of authority. Generally speaking, people appeal to one of four sources of authority in order to inform their choices: Scripture, tradition, reason, or experience.[19]

The way that one prioritizes and orders these sources of authority will go a long way in determining what kind of normative ethic the person develops. For example, if someone believes that the Bible should serve as his or her chief source of authority, then the person's normative system will likely be shaped by the content of Scripture. From our perspective, this would include an emphasis on both developing virtues in hopes of conforming to the character of Jesus Christ and obeying objective moral standards that God reveals in the form of commandments. If a person appeals to experience as his or her chief source of

19. Historically, these are referred to as the "Wesleyan Quadrilateral." See Donald A. D. Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990; repr., Lexington, KY: Emeth, 2005); Thomas C. Oden, *The Living God*, vol. 1 of *Systematic Theology* (Peabody, MA: Hendriksen, 2008), 330–39.

authority, then that person's normative system will likely downplay the role of absolutes and commands and opt instead for an ethic that maximizes personal autonomy and freedom from rules. What a person appeals to as the means to justify behavior will reflect his or her underlying worldview assumptions and ideas about what we can know and will in turn shape the way that he or she believes we should live.

A distinctly Christian ethic understands that the Bible guides the development of our thinking about obedient love in two categorical ways: *revealed reality* and *revealed morality*.[20] First, as *revealed reality*, Scripture gives an accurate and foundational understanding of the nature of reality and the way things *are*. It provides for us a metaphysical (and therefore metaethical) framework by which to understand our world. The Bible opens to us a window through which we can glimpse the underlying reality of the nature of all things and how those revealed realities ought to shape how we perceive, understand, and bring judgments to the world in which we live (worldview). In giving us this picture of reality, it also indicates to us those goods and ends that are worthy of being the objects of our love, desires, and affections.

Second, Scripture as *revealed morality* provides norms, principles, rules, guidelines, and moral examples for us to become the kind of people that he designed and created us to be, and then to act in accord not only with our designed nature but also with the original design of the world as God created it. In this way, revelation guides both our love for God and our obedience to God, that we might be rightly conformed to his character and rightly ordered to loving obedience, and thus experience the abundant life that Christ promised (John 10:10). It provides us with the normative action guides, or moral map, to live in the world that God created and reveals to us. Oliver O'Donovan is correct when

20. Here we are adopting and adapting the language of James M. Gustafson, who originally (and influentially) employed these terms to identify two very distinct ways in which Christian ethicists tend to use the Bible to develop their moral theories. On the one hand, according to Gustafson, there is a tendency for some to see the Bible as a revelation of God's will through the assertion of commandments and deontological requirements (duties). This understanding of revealed morality he attributed primarily to conservative, evangelical Protestants. On the other hand, he sees Karl Barth as the key figure representing a revealed-reality approach because Barth emphasized that the Bible's purpose was to reveal God and his activity in the world, not merely standards of behavior. In so doing, then, human moral agents were responsible for an appropriate response to the living God, not the abstract requirements of law or list of commands that may be found in Scripture. While Gustafson saw these as distinct and perhaps even competing ideas, our purpose here is to demonstrate that these categories must function in unison and in a mutually reinforcing relationship in order for Christian ethics to faithfully reflect the design of God and thus properly be an ethic of worship. See James M. Gustafson, "Christian Ethics," in *Religion*, ed. Paul Ramsey (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 309–16. See also James M. Gustafson, "The Place of Scripture in Christian Ethics: A Methodological Study," *Interpretation* 24, no. 4 (1970): 430–55, reprinted in James M. Gustafson, *Theology and Christian Ethics* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim, 1974), 121–45.

he asserts that purposeful action must be determined in light of what is true about the world in which we live, love, and act.[21]

Embodied by Obedient Love

Obedient love is the fourth distinguishing mark of Christian ethics. With Christ as the center, thankful Christ-followers who recognize Scripture as their primary source of authority will then be compelled to embody and practice their ethical system in light of God's commands to both love him and obey him. Jesus, then, is held to be not only one's Savior, but also one's Lord, who is *the* way, *the* truth, and *the* life (John 14:6).

When Jesus was asked which of the commandments was the most important, he highlighted the idea of love—love of God and love of neighbor. In Mark 12:28–31, we read:

> One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, "What commandment is the foremost of all?" Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

According to Jesus, the gravitational center and chief imperative of Christian ethics is *love*. Love is first and foremost directed to God, and then directed toward neighbor. This love requires total commitment of the self in a holistic and fundamental ordering to God that includes one's affections, beliefs, thoughts, and actions—everything about us. For Jesus' disciples, nothing else is more central or more important. Christian ethics is flavored from top to bottom by God's command to his people to love in a manner that shapes the totality of who we are to *be*, as well as what we are to *do*. Love, in Christian ethics, is both the central virtue to develop and the chief duty to perform. Jesus tells his disciples that it is precisely this kind of Christian love that they are to be known for (John 13:35).

If it is true that love is the chief imperative of Christian ethics, then the most important follow-up question we can ask is this: How? How do we love God with all we are? How do we act in love toward others? The answer that Jesus gives us is *obedience*. In John 14:15, he asserts, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." Then a few verses later, he reverses the order and declares, "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me" (v. 21). Obedience to

21. Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), ix.

God's commandments provides the norms of behavior that help us both develop the virtue of love and express that virtue in our actions.

Love and obedience are to serve in a dynamic relationship with each other to mutually reinforce the manner in which we give thanks to God and worship him as the Scripture guides us. As the apostle Paul asserts in Romans 13:10, "love is the fulfillment of the law," and in Galatians 5:6, we find "faith working through love." Paul Ramsey states that "instantaneous, total obedience to the demands of God's reign and perfect love for man are in fact precisely the same thing. Obedience means no more than love and love fulfills every legitimate obedience."[22] Similarly, Waldo Beach and H. Richard Niebuhr observe, "Christian ethics says in many different ways that the Christian life consists in the response of obedient love to God in whatever he wills."[23]

The dynamic relationship between love and obedience informs all other questions about how we are to live our lives ethically unto God and in the service of our neighbors. While Christian ethics is concerned with questions of justice, rights, obligations, duties, sins, and the like, all of these can become clear only when obedient love first forms the shape of Christian ethics.[24]

Discipleship-Focused

The fifth distinguishing element that shapes the context of Christian ethics follows logically from the first. Because Christ is the Creator, the Redeemer, and the One to whom our lives must conform (Rom. 8:29), a focus on discipleship is at the heart of living ethically. It is a quest to become like him in all the ways that we can, to live in accord with all his instructions for us, and thereby to experience the abundant life that he came to give (John 10:10). It is imperative to understand that the study of Christian ethics is not merely or even primarily interested in discovering or developing a system of rules for behavior modification. For the Christian, ethics is about shaping our lives to conform to Christ, who is our Creator, moral exemplar, Savior, and object of worship. Thus, the ethical context for understanding and embodying obedient love is one of discipleship.

Missionally Oriented

Finally, a contextual element of a distinctly Christian ethic is its missional orientation. In Matthew 28:18–20, we find that Jesus' final words to his disciples before he ascended to heaven provide crucial (though often-overlooked) instructions about the missional nature of Christian ethics:

22. Paul Ramsey, *Basic Christian Ethics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), 34.

23. Beach and Niebuhr, *Christian Ethics*, 5.

24. Ramsey, *Basic Christian Ethics*, xi. Ramsey comments to this end: "this concept [of obedient love, which is] basic to any understanding of the Christian outlook with the demands it places upon moral action, gives

> And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Jesus desires that his disciples—those who follow him in obedient love—express their love by telling their neighbors (local and global) the good news about himself, and then teaching them to obey his commandments in like manner.

Not only is Christian ethics about learning and growing a *personal* love for God and obedience to him; it is also concerned that our neighbors (both local and global) know and love God and learn to obey his commands. Through the lenses of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20), we learn that the Great Commandment (Mark 12:28–31) is vitally linked to both the proclamation of saving faith in Christ (evangelism) and the embodiment of that faith in ethical practices that shape issues of society and culture in all nations. Jesus came not only to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10), but also to preach the gospel to the poor, release those who are in captivity, heal the blind and lame, and set free the oppressed (Luke 4:18).[25]

It is through understanding this connection between the *Great Commandment* and the *Great Commission* that we discover that Christian ethics is concerned that human beings from every people, tribe, tongue, and nation would obediently love him, such that "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Hab. 2:14). In this sense, Christian ethics is a means for social impact precisely because it is a Great Commission ethic. The missional element of Christian ethics has as its final goal the proper worship of God by the entirety of human society and all creation.

What is Christian ethics? In sum, it is a Christ-centered response of thanksgiving, rightly ordered by Scripture to be a service unto God in obedient love that is formed and embodied in a discipleship that is oriented missionally, such that all creation might once again do what it was created to do: maximally render unto God all the praise, honor, and glory that he is due.

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us the clue essential to understanding certain other ideas, such as 'justice,' 'right' or 'obligation,' 'duties to oneself,' 'vocation,' 'virtues' or moral character, 'sinfulness' and the 'image of God,' which in turn are of crucial importance in elaborating a theory of Christian ethics."

25. For a helpful discussion on the relationship between the mission of the church to proclaim the gospel and the ethical implications of the gospel, see Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 91–113.

Table 1.4. The Distinguishing Marks of Christian Ethics

1. Christocentric Foundation
2. Response of Thanksgiving
3. Scripturally Ordered
4. Embodied by Loving Obedience
5. Discipleship-Focused
6. Missionally Oriented

Conclusion

We began this chapter by listing many of the prevailing ethical issues of the day and considering how they relate to some of humanity's most enduring moral questions. We then considered how the manner in which we address any and all moral issues will be shaped by underlying worldview assumptions that every one of us has, even if we don't know it or are unable to articulate them. From there, we showed how worldview assumptions connect to the discipline of ethics through the branch of ethics known as *metaethics*, and how these in turn shape how we form our normative ethical systems, and ultimately apply our ideas, beliefs, and convictions to real-world situations. We then moved to a discussion of Christian ethics and attempted to identify its most distinctive elements.

By way of conclusion, we can summarize the main points of this chapter by offering five reasons why it is important to engage wholeheartedly in the study of Christian ethics.

First, studying ethics is important because ethics helps us answer life's *most enduring questions*: How should I live my life? How should we as a society live our lives together? Of course, these general questions can be broken down into more common ones that we face each day: How should I treat my friends? How should I treat my family? Should I respect those in authority over me? Why should I obey a speed limit? Can I cheat on my test to get ahead? Are there limits to sexual expression? Should people's skin color or ethnicity affect how I think of them or treat them as image-bearers? When properly understood, the discipline of ethics provides the means to address all the questions that we face daily, from the most mundane to the most problematic.

Second, it is important to study ethics because the discipline of Christian ethics deals with the questions that are *most important* to human life: What is the meaning of life? How can I be happy? Is there such a thing as right and wrong that transcends my own preferences? Is there such a thing as ultimate good and evil? How should the answers to these questions shape my life? Do my choices relate to

anything more than this life on earth? Do my moral decisions matter for eternity? When properly understood, the discipline of ethics depends first and foremost on Scripture to provide a rich understanding of, and answers to, these questions.

A third reason is the reality that *everyone is already an ethicist, but not everyone realizes it*. That is, every person has opinions on moral matters, and everyone's opinions on these moral matters come from a deeper frame of reference that we identified as worldview assumptions or *metaethics*. Sadly, however, while most of us will have had training in how to perform a science experiment, produce a well-written paper, or play an instrument, very few will have had any comparable training in how to understand morality and ethics. Thus, studying ethics not only helps us understand and form our own convictions and opinions, but also helps us navigate important discussions with understanding and consistency.

Fourth, developing skills in ethical thinking and living helps *guide us through the labyrinth of "real life" in a consistent and meaningful way*. It helps us understand why people think as they do, why nations react as they do, why our hearts have the longings they do. It helps us understand how others are approaching subjects of great importance and why they may or may not hold differing opinions. It gives us criteria by which to evaluate our own point of view, as well as the views held by others. Ultimately, it serves to guide our daily actions and decisions in a manner consistent with our most deeply held beliefs and ideas.

Finally, the study of ethics is important because it *enables us to live a life that maximizes God's glory* in accord with the way he created the universe and with the moral guidelines he placed within it, and in anticipation of an ever-increasing life of joy with God in eternity. In other words, the study of ethics is important because, when done rightly, it is the path to our becoming the kind of worshipers that Jesus is looking for: "true worshipers" who worship God "in spirit and truth" (John 4:23–24).

Table 1.5. Five Reasons Why Studying Christian Ethics Is Important

1. Because ethics deals with the questions that are most *enduring* to human life.
2. Because ethics deals with the questions that are most *important* to human life.
3. Because everyone acts and thinks from an *ethical framework*. Working to understand ethics and intentionally shaping one's own view enables wise navigation in important moral discussions.
4. Because developing skills in ethical thinking and living helps *guide* us through the labyrinth of "real life" in a consistent and meaningful way.
5. Because having a biblically faithful ethical foundation and system enables us to live a life that *maximizes God's glory*.

Key Terms and Concepts

anthropology
applied ethics
doxology
epistemology
flourishing
inherent value
metaethics
metaphysics
morality is discovered
morality is invented
normative ethics
obedient love
orthodoxy
orthopraxy
penal substitutionary atonement
revealed morality
revealed reality
worldview

Key Scriptures

Genesis 1:1
Habakkuk 2:14
Matthew 28:18–20
Mark 12:28–31
John 10:10
John 14:6
Romans 3:23
Romans 5:8
Romans 8:29
2 Corinthians 13:5
Colossians 1:16
1 John 3:2

Study Questions

1. Central to the discussion and study of ethics is the question "Is morality discovered or invented?" Why is this question so foundational? How does the way in which a person answers this question impact the way that he or she will approach any ethical issue? Consider the topic of homosexuality, for example. How might the way in which one answers this question affect the way that the person reaches a conclusion regarding the morality of same-sex marriage?
2. What is a worldview, and how is it related to a person's ethical decision-making?
3. Distinguish between metaethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics. How are they related? How are they distinct?
4. In this chapter, the authors list six distinguishing marks of Christian ethics. What are those six, and how does each one set Christian ethics apart from other religious- or secular-based ethical systems?
5. How is Christian ethics related to discipleship? How is it related to the Great Commission?

For Further Reading

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