

## The Foundation of Biblical Ethics

1 Pet. 1:14-16

### Introduction:

1. Ethics is defined as the discipline dealing with what is good and bad and with moral duty and obligation.
2. The word, "ethics," is used to describe what is right and wrong and the standard of conduct by which people live their lives.
3. Some say there is no absolute standard of right and wrong, but Peter would say, "The Holy One who called you, is the standard," and even quotes Him, "You shall be holy, for I am holy" (Lev. 11:44; 19:2; 20:7).
4. There is a call to holiness. There is a call to obedience. And it is a call to "be like the Holy One."

### Discussion:

- I. Biblical ethics finds its origin in the very nature of God and calls us to imitate Him.
  - A. It is evident in the recurring formula of the O.T.: "You shall be holy, for I am holy."
    1. Lev. 11:44-45: "I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. . . For I am the Lord who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God; thus you shall be holy for I am holy." There is a demand that the people consecrate themselves. A consecration, a separation from Egypt and a joining to God, was involved in Israel's holiness.
    2. Lev. 19:2: "You shall be holy, for I am holy." Identifies God as the standard of holiness.
    3. Lev. 20:7-8: "You shall consecrate yourselves therefore and be holy, for I am the Lord your God. You shall keep My statutes and practice them; I am the Lord who sanctifies you." We are actively involved in our consecration. But the Lord sanctifies. It involves keeping statutes and practicing them.
    4. Lev. 20:26 reiterates what is said in 11:44-45 in different language. "You are to be holy to Me, for I the Lord am holy; and I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine." There is a setting apart from the peoples and a joining to Him.
  - B. It is evident in the similar statements in the N.T.
    1. Matt. 5:48: "Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."
    2. Lk. 6:36: "Be merciful, as your Father is merciful."
    3. And the text of 1 Pet. 1:14-16 which calls on us to "not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but as obedient children, to be holy."
  - C. This code of conduct is bound up with the record of what God has done for His people.
    1. Regularly when God lays some specific obligation on Israel it is prefaced by a rehearsal of what He has done for them, and so God's action becomes the standard and pattern on which they are to model themselves.
    2. The Ten Commandments do not begin with a commandment, but a statement, "I am

the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Ex. 20:2).

3. The code of Deuteronomy is preceded by a detailed history (chaps. 1-3) telling of the magnificent way God led Israel from the beginning. (He defeated their enemies as they came out of Egypt (1:4ff). He gave them the land of the Canaanites (1:6ff). That generation rebelled and did not enter Canaan. He multiplied them (1:9ff). He led them in the wilderness (2:1ff; vs. 7 esp.).)
  - a. Chapter 3 rehearses the history from Sinai to the invasion of the Promised Land.
  - b. Chapter 4 then calls for loyalty to God and willing obedience to His law.
  - c. Chapter 5:1-6 calls on Israel to hear, learn and observe carefully the statutes and ordinances.
  - d. After this the Deuteronomic form of the Ten Commandments is given (5:7ff).
4. The pattern of the Pentateuch follows the same procedure.
  - a. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers describe what God has done.
  - b. Deuteronomy then gives the terms of the covenant.
5. The Jews identified 613 specific commandments (248 positive and 365 prohibitive), but it is the story of who God is and His relationship to His people that gives form to the commandments.

II. The setting of God’s requirements in the framework of God’s gifts (what He has done) constantly recurs in the Bible. This is particularly evident in the Epistles.

- A. A rehearsal of God’s mighty acts of deliverance through Christ precede the demands of Christian conduct.
- B. Romans 1-8 – God has provided salvation by means of Jesus Christ.  
9-11 – The special problems created by the Jewish rejection of the Messiah.  
12:1-15:3 – Conduct now expected.
- C. Galatians 1-4 – Describes the meaning of the work of Christ.  
5-6 – Identify the nature of Christian freedom and the way we are to live.
- D. Ephesians 1-3 – God’s goodness demonstrated in all spiritual blessings being given through Christ.  
4-6 – Now live like this . . .
- E. 1 Pet. 1:1-2:10 – Describe the work of the Savior.  
1:11-5:11 – Identify the duties of the saved.
- F. It is evident in first century sermons.
  1. Acts 2:22-36—What God has done.  
37-42—What you are to do.
  2. Acts 3:13-16—What God has done.  
17-26—What you are to do.
  3. Acts 17:24-29—What God has done.  
30-31—What you are to do.

III. The importance of all this is that it brings us face to face with the fact that our relationship to God is the foundation of all ethical teaching in the biblical text. It is unfair to merely read about what God has done and then ignore the ethical demands, to give no consideration to the call to behavior that is consistent with God’s behavior.

- A. The biblical text is not just a list of do's and don'ts.
- B. Right and wrong cannot be limited to a mere list of rules. It is relational.
- C. But it is not nebulous so that anything goes. The catalogue of "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt not" are concrete things that must be done or not done because these are the will of God.
- D. Note the summaries in Scripture.
  - 1. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind **and** your neighbor as yourself." (Deut. 6:5; Matt. 22:34-40). We interpret this to love our neighbor like we love ourselves, maybe the idea is that we love our neighbor as God loves us and our neighbor.
  - 2. "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (Jn. 14:15).
  - 3. Thus the judgment is based on our behavior, but it is behavior founded upon relationship (Matt. 25:40). "To the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me."
  - 4. It is about submission to the King (Matt. 25:34). "The King will say to those on His right . . ."

Conclusion:

- 1. Biblical ethics is not just about doing the things on a list of rules.
- 2. It is about our relationship to God.
- 3. It is unfair to read Scripture and only see the good things that God has done for us without hearing the call to go and do as He has done.
- 4. "As obedient children," Peter says, "Do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'"