



**CHRISTIAN  
MORALS  
AND  
ETHICS**

**by Russell Collins**

# CHRISTIAN MORALS AND ETHICS

## Introduction

Dictionaries define morals as the principles concerned with the distinction between right and wrong, or between good and evil in human behaviour, especially in relation to actions. The word “moral” comes from the Latin “moralis”, which means relating to manners, and customs, and thus to the conduct of a person.

Ethics can be regarded as the codification of morality, that is, a system of moral principles by which human thought and actions may be judged to be good or bad, right or wrong, and thus ethics form the basis for rules of moral conduct. The word “ethics” comes from the Greek word “ethikos”, which means relating to morals, as a system of human duty and lawful conduct.

Today there is confusion and doubt in the world concerning what is right and wrong, particularly in the area of human relationships. Some Christians are even unsure of the stand they should take and the reasons behind the Christian rejection of many present-day so-called community standards.

To begin with, the Christian accepts the Bible as the Word of God, and the ultimate authority in all matters including morals and ethics. The Word of God establishes absolute values, and is the foundation on which the Christian bases all his or her thinking. For the Christian there is no doubt about the authority of commandments such as:

*“Thou shalt not kill,  
Thou shalt not steal,  
Thou shalt not bear false witness” (lie).*

(Exodus 20: 13, 15 and 16)

Other commandments may seem to be less clear in their intention, and societies have taken the liberty of changing their meaning. This has led people away from God's standards of proper conduct on many important issues. Let us look at some of these issues, such as permissiveness, divorce, homosexuality, abortion and evolution.

## **Permissiveness**

Permissiveness is a term that covers many aspects of modern living, in particular people's attitudes towards, and the condoning of, personal relationships that were not condoned in former times. The term is most frequently used in relation to people living together without the commitment of marriage vows, and also the forming of relationships between people on a short-term basis, in which physical desires are gratified without intention that such relationships will be continued.

It is frequently said that such relationships are now acceptable, as community standards have changed. If a Christian believer disagrees, he or she is labelled "old-fashioned", and accused of not moving with the times. On this matter, as on all matters, the Christian must not be diverted from the fact that the Scripture must be the standard by which attitudes and conduct are measured.

The Scripture is *"given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness"* (2 Timothy 3:16).

On the matter of permissiveness the Scripture is clear and unambiguous. The seventh commandment in Exodus 20:14 says *"Thou shalt not commit adultery"*. It may be argued against this that the commandment relates to another time, another dispensation, and applied only to Jews. These arguments are true, but do not dispose of the issue because the issue is one of morals laid down by God, which stand for all time, and four New Testament writers quote the commandment.

The Apostles at the Jerusalem council included fornication in matters forbidden by God, in Acts 15:20 – *“But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.”*, in Acts 15: 29 and also in Acts 21:25. The inspired Apostle Paul also expressly forbids fornication in 1 Corinthians 6: 13 and 18 – *“ .... Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord;”, “Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.”*, Ephesians 5:3 – *“But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not be once named among you,”* and 1 Thessalonians 4:3 – *“For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication:”*

Therefore, fornication and adultery are activities forbidden by God. The fact that large numbers of people are disregarding God's rules, and appealing to the shifting sands of community standards, does not alter the absolute decree of God and the Christian's obligation to obey it.

## **Divorce**

The number of divorces has greatly increased in recent years. Is it in order for a person to seek divorce from his or her wife or husband?

The Lord Jesus said, as recorded in Matthew 5:32 – *“That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery”*. He said the same thing in Matthew 19:9. Thus, the only Scriptural ground for divorce is fornication or adultery. The fact that laws made by humans permit divorce on a number of grounds does not alter or negate God's requirements.

As the Lord Jesus said, *“Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and*

*shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder"* (Matthew 19: 4 to 6).

We thus go back to the beginning, to the origin of marriage, and see that marriage is a binding relationship ordained by God and intended to last throughout the lives of the married partners.

## **Homosexuality**

Oprah Winfrey, TV talk show hostess, asked her audience why homosexuals should not be allowed to marry one another. One man said something to the effect that "it wasn't natural". A woman then rose and gave her lengthy opinion which boiled down to: "I just don't think it's right!" Most people, however, gave comments like, "If they want to, what difference does it make?" or, "Who's to say it's wrong?"

Then Oprah came to one man who said "If God had wanted man to marry man, He would have created Adam and Steve, not Adam and Eve". Most people in the audience booed, and Oprah responded incredulously, "You don't believe that do you?" The man, apparently intimidated, shrugged his shoulders and did not carry his reasoning any further. In doing so he missed a great opportunity to promote God's creation message on national television.

The thought underlying the man's statement is the reason why homosexual practices are wrong. They are wrong because God, through His word, has declared them to be wrong.

The cities of the plain, Sodom and Gomorrah, were destroyed by God because of the wickedness of the people. Prevalent in this wickedness were homosexual practices. The term sodomy has its origin in the ancient city in which homosexual practices brought down the wrath of God upon the inhabitants (Genesis 19: 1 to 26).

The Apostle Paul makes it clear that homosexual practices are wrong in 1 Corinthians 6: 9 and 10 – “... *Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.*”, and in Romans 1: 26, 27 and 32.

Many people think that rules concerning homosexuality have been made by people, just as traffic laws and building regulations have been made by people. Many people therefore reason that such rules need changing and updating from time to time. They do not realise nor acknowledge that God has made absolute laws for all time. The fact that many people may dislike some of God's laws, and choose to disobey or disregard them, does not alter the fact that God's laws are absolute and for people's benefit, and to ignore God's laws will lead to unhappiness.

## **Abortion**

The consideration of human abortion is a situation that should not have developed, but due to man's waywardness it has become an issue that has caused much grief and harm. When Christians are involved in discussions with non-Christians they sometimes tend to adopt the same criterion as non-believers, namely to assume that people make all the rules. If this is accepted then standards become meaningless and only popular opinion can decide the matter.

In this, and in many other contentious issues, the matter is usually determined by the courts. But, as with wars, there are no winners in these cases.

The advocate of abortion maintains that it is an absolute right that a woman has control over her own body, even when the taking of another person's life is involved. This alleged right cannot be absolute if it is merely people who claim to be giving

women these rights. Rules and laws made by people may change and indeed do change with time and changing circumstances.

The Scriptural position with Christians is that our bodies belong ultimately to God through Jesus Christ, as the Apostle Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 6: 19 and 20. *“What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.”*

Biological research has established that at the completion of fertilisation, the cell contains all the information for the development of a human being, a distinct individual with the blueprint of his or her body and intellectual potential set in place. Abortion involves the killing of this embryonic person, and transgresses God's absolute law forbidding the killing of another human being.

## **Evolution**

Belief in the theory of evolution is a moral issue because it necessarily involves the denial of God's word which tells us that the earth with all that is in it has been created by God.

The theory of evolution contradicts the teaching of Jesus Christ as the corresponding price for Adam, and results in the denial of the necessity of Christ to die as a ransom for the human race. If human beings are products of random chance events, then belief in God and Jesus Christ is rejected, and people are free to make their own rules about anything. The result can only be chaos and moral anarchy.

## Conclusion

There are two inimical flaws in the arguments of people who have no absolute authority for their ethics and moral beliefs.

1. They reject God and His absolute standards, but want their own moral rules to be absolute and binding on everybody.
2. They base their rules and laws on human opinion which can change, and make it necessary for human-based rules and laws to change.

If God's word and His absolute standards are rejected, on what basis should we decide what is right and wrong?

Why was it wrong for Hitler to do what he did? If God did not lay down absolute standards, Hitler or anyone else would have the right to set his own rules and his own agenda. He had most of Germany agreeing with his ethics which he believed were right and proper. Because of this, millions of people suffered terribly and perished. If Hitler is declared to have been wrong, on what basis is it to be decided that he was wrong?

This extreme example serves to show that morals and ethics based on human opinion leave the way open for any evil or wrongdoing to be justified on the ground of whatever people think may be right or wrong.

The basis for moral judgment for the Christian is founded in the words of Jesus in Matthew 22: 37 to 40 – *"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it. Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."*

These words of Jesus state the great law of love, and make it a commandment binding on all believers.



If we are involved in discussions on morals and ethics we must be sure to maintain our stand that God has laid down absolute rules and laws, and not allow ourselves to be accused of simply basing our comments or arguments on opinion.

Confronted by such evidence, unbelievers may say, "This is only your opinion. How do you know that the Bible is God's word? Why should I take any notice of it?". In response it needs to be said that there are good and sufficient reasons for believing that the Bible is a book unlike any other book, and could only have been directed and overseen by a power or influence superior to the human. In the Bible are recorded rules and laws laid down by God that are absolute and for all time. (See "Why Believe the Bible?", also available from the New Covenant Fellowship.)

If we can help people to understand that they have transgressed God's absolutes and are in need of a Saviour, we would have God's approval, as James tells us, *"...he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."* (James 5:20).



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