

The Bible & Morality

Definitions from the Oxford Dictionary:

- Morality: “principles concerning the distinction between right and wrong or good and bad behaviour:”
- Ethics: “moral principles that govern a person's behaviour or the conducting of an activity:”

So we are talking about what is “right” and what is “wrong”, and how that shapes a person’s behaviour.

Cultural context

A short guide to Moral Philosophy:

The field of ethics (or moral philosophy) involves systematizing, defending, and recommending concepts of right and wrong behavior. Philosophers today usually divide ethical theories into three general subject areas: metaethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics. *Metaethics* investigates where our ethical principles come from, and what they mean. Are they merely social inventions? Do they involve more than expressions of our individual emotions? Metaethical answers to these questions focus on the issues of universal truths, the will of God, the role of reason in ethical judgments, and the meaning of ethical terms themselves. *Normative ethics* takes on a more practical task, which is to arrive at moral standards that regulate right and wrong conduct. This may involve articulating the good habits that we should acquire, the duties that we should follow, or the consequences of our behavior on others. Finally, *applied ethics* involves examining specific controversial issues, such as [abortion](#), infanticide, [animal rights](#), [environmental concerns](#), [homosexuality](#), [capital punishment](#), or nuclear [war](#).

(James Fieser)

Meta ethics – where do principles come from?

Normative ethics – moral standards that regulate right and wrong.

Applied ethics – examining specific issues.

In the Beginning

It all started in a garden, a long time ago. God said you can eat of this, but not of that: this is right, and that is wrong.

Man ate from the tree anyway. And God said, “Since man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil, he must not reach out, and also take from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever.” (Gen 3:22)

Does this mean that we instinctively know what is good and what is evil? When God spoke to Cain He said, “If you do right, won’t you be accepted?” (Gen 4:7). So Cain knew right and wrong.

The Law

Years later, as a nation was birthed, so God gave more specific guidance on what was right and wrong. This is seen in the Law, and most explicitly in the 10 Commandments. These tell us:

- Our understanding of right and wrong comes from God (Ex 20:1)
- How to live in a right way with God (Ex 20:2-11)
- How to live in a right way with each other (Ex 20:12-17)

There are many other regulations that flow out from these basic commandments.

What did Jesus say?

Jesus spoke about the commandments, making it clear that true morality is not just external observance of a code, but an internal attitude of heart (Matt 5-7).

Jesus tells us that “the law and the prophets depend on these two commandments”: love God and love each other. (Matt 22:37-40). Again we see:

- God giving us the answer
- How to live with God
- How to live with each other

So what does the Bible say about morality?

In the Bible we are told that we have a basic, inbuilt, intrinsic, understanding of right and wrong which is a result of Adam and Eve eating from the tree of knowledge. God has Himself explained to us what types of behaviour are right and wrong in the Law, and Jesus shows us that it is not just about behaviour but what is in our hearts.

So far we have looked at the metaethics (God tells us right and wrong), and about normative ethics (the Law tells us how to behave), but what about applied ethics? How do we know how to make this work in specific situations?

What we do know – Commands. There are specific commands in the Bible that state clearly what is right and what is wrong (as defined by God).

What we can learn – Principles. There are teachings in the Bible that can reveal principles that can be applied to situations not explicitly written about in the Bible.

This should help us in most situations we face in life.

Is it possible to live a moral life?

Another way of asking this question is to say, is it possible to live a holy life? Romans 3:23 tells us that all have sinned, so should we just accept this and live with our own flawed humanness?

Romans 6 tells us, “No”. We are not to live in sin. We are not to live immoral lives.

Romans 8 tells us how. We are to live by The Spirit. We are to let the Holy Spirit guide us so we live right! SO, theoretically, a sinless life is possible, it is a Spirit-filled, 100% Holy Spirit led life. A completely holy, moral, life is seen in Jesus Christ; and a Christ-like life will be a holy, moral, life.

God is seen as the source of our morality (Father), the example of a moral life (Son), and the one who transforms us (Spirit) so we live by that morality day by day.