

The dictionary says that ethics are related to morals. The nature and grounds of moral obligation, moral philosophy teaches our duty and the reasons for it

Not all God's creatures have ethics, most do not. Only those who live in the sea (whales and dolphins), some birds and some land animals such as African lions, American bison, horses, etc. have ethics, and of course us humans. Those which have ethics live in groups where the survival of the group and the individual are interdependent.

My professor of Christian ethics in seminary began our first class with this declaration "most people's concept of sin is limited to drinkin, smokin, and screwin." The purpose of the course was to greatly expand our understanding of sin far beyond that of white, middle class, protestant, southern small town niceties.

In last Sunday's gospel lesson Jesus told his hearers that they were meant to be the salt of the earth. But their salt had lost its savor, It's quality of saltiness. And the light they were intended to shine was hidden. They had the law and were devout in keeping it. But if they were to enter the kingdom of heaven their quality of righteousness not the quantity had to increase. The scribes and Pharisees might know the law in minute detail but they might abuse it to confiscate widows' houses.

In his old age, W. C. Fields was in the hospital. He asked the nurse if she could find him a bible "Are you getting religion?? She asked. "No my dear, I'm just looking for loopholes" replied the great man. The scribes and Pharisees abused the law looking for loopholes.

Jesus reaffirmed that the greatest commandment was to love God with all our being and that the second was just as important, to love our neighbor as our self. It is the quality of love, self-sacrificing agape love, that restores the saltiness to the salt, that enlightens the world with our lamp. But sometimes there are human difficulties and problems in which love alone is not enough.

This brings in the need for ethical enlightenment. For this we turn to three sources, scripture, tradition and reason.

What does the bible say about this? Are there any laws or an analogous situations recorded there? There may be, but scripture was written long ago about events even farther back in history and in a different language about societies that are very different from ours. So scripture may give us only part of the help we need.

We have to look at tradition too. Have situations like this arisen before? What was done about it? How did that turn out?

Now we must turn to the most risky aide, the one we might be tempted to abuse the worst, reason. Reason is far more than simple common sense, though that may be included. Reason will add depth to our understanding with all kinds of recent discoveries about what it means to be a Human being. Does this information give us the answer? Perhaps, perhaps not.

In the same way that some issues in science are clear (e.g., the law of gravity) and other issues are less clear (e.g., the nature of black holes), so Episcopalians see that some issues are clear (e.g., the obscenity of racism) and other issues are less clear (e.g., the legitimacy of a just war). With the issues that are less clear, we are required to be in community, struggling and grappling with these issues.

All of our discussion and debate and arguing and research and counter research must be done in the context of community because the maintenance of community is the purpose of ethics. Without community and our need for it no ethical issues would ever arise. Each of us would be like a fly or a mosquito, a total individual eating reproducing and dying alone without any relationships, not even to our fellow flies or mosquitoes.

From the beginning of the 20th century until now, certain ethical issues have been debated in the Episcopal Church:

- 1 birth control
- 2 marriage vs. living together
- 3 Divorce and remarriage
- 4 Social justice demanded by Jesus and the prophets and the methods of achieving it
- 5 participation in wars
- 6 abortion and euthanasia
- 7 homosexuality
- 8 PROPER ATTITUDE TOWARD MONEY AND WEALTH

Each of these issues falls into what I would call a “morally grey area” one in which a strong argument can be made on the opposing side of each issue involved. That is why these issues Must be dealt with in the context of community the Episcopal Church is a community of faith.

Our nation too is a community and like any community is more than the sum of its parts, 200,000,000+(sic) individual Americans. Regardless of the religious identity that any of us espouses, we are each faced with the same most fundamental ethical question: how will my words and deeds affect the lives of others? Will they add to or detract from the quality and span of that person's life?

The creation story tells us that after God created Adam he observed that "it is not good for the man to be alone". He did not remedy the situation by cloning Adam i.e. creating a multitude of identical Adams to keep each other company. Even if there were a million cloned Adams each would still be alone with no one to share the various wonders of creation no one to see things differently, no external source of creativity. Instead he created Eve, a totally unique human but different from Adam with her own thoughts, ideas and viewpoints, someone with whom Adam would have to come to terms, to coexist.

By creating two different human beings, God built into the creation the need for dialogue and compromise and argument and counter argument, agreement and disagreement, mutual expectations and covenants which all converge in ethics.

God's will for us is companionship and positive relationships with himself and with one another. Ethics is a compass, a beacon that keeps us from getting lost in the swamp and jungle of our own self-interest by keeping us aware of our duty to one another. Love gives us the energy and strength to live ethically.

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