

INTRODUCTION TO BIBLICAL HEALTH FIELD ETHICS

COURSE CONTENT

DEFINITION OF ETHICS

WORLD VIEWS AND ETHICS

DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES OF ETHICS

1. CONSEQUENTIAL PERSPECTIVE
1. NORMATIVE PERSPECTIVE
1. EXISTENTIAL PERSPECTIVE
1. VIRTUE PERSPECTIVE

FOUNDATIONS OF A BIBLICAL CHRISTIAN APPROACH TO ETHICS

HOW TO PRACTICE BIBLICAL MEDICAL ETHICS

COURSE OBJECTIVES

At the end of this study you should be able to:

1. Define Ethics
1. Give reasons for Studying Ethics in the Health Field
1. Define world Views and clearly state your own World View
1. Recognize different World Views held by your colleagues and patients in the Health Field.
1. Explain the four major perspectives of Ethics discussed
1. Apply the principles learnt in approaching an Ethical Dilemma

WHAT IS ETHICS?

The word comes from the Greek word - **Ethos**.
It means a place to stay, a home, living
Custom, rule of conduct

Def.: The science of moral conduct
The inquiry into man's moral nature to discover what his responsibilities
are, and the
means, by which
he may fulfill
them.

Ethics **DESCRIBES** what an individual or a certain group of people **is doing**.

Ethics also **PRESCRIBES** what the individual or group **should be doing**.

It attempts to answer the question
- what is right and wrong, good and bad, and how to achieve what is
good

On a personal level ethics is the conscious and systematic choice by which a
person governs his or her conduct.

WHY SHOULD WE STUDY HEALTH FIELD ETHICS?

Because of the nature of our profession.

Increase in science and technology

The rise of Situational Ethics

The selfish nature of man

Personal accountability to God.

Ethical Codes and Ethics

In the past many attempts have been made to provide universally acceptable
guidelines for ethically sound behaviour. They include a number of Declarations,

Oaths and Codes.

- / Go through the first three codes included with your notes (The Oath of Hippocrates, the Constitution of WHO, the International Code of Medical ethics of the World Medical Association) and list the ethical principles upon which these codes are based.

World Views and Ethics

Definition of World View

- ? How we see the world
- ? The comprehensive framework of one's fundamental beliefs regarding the whole of what is real.
- ? A set of presuppositions which we hold consciously or unconsciously about the make-up of our world
- ? The view of and the experiencing of the totality of relationships between God, man and nature.

LIST SOME ETHICAL QUESTIONS THAT YOU HAVE BEEN STRUGGLING WITH:

A

.....
.....
.....
.....

B

.....
.....
.....
.....

C

.....
.....
.....
.....

Every approach to healthcare ethics is the fruit of its underlying root, world view. A world view is the comprehensive framework of one's fundamental beliefs regarding the whole of what is real (reality).

There are seven major world views, and they are summarized in addendum 1.

As far as ethics are concerned, three world view elements are vital:

- the view of God (Does He exist? Is He personal? If He exist, will all men give an account to Him for their behaviour? Is He the final reference point regarding ethical norms?)
- the view of man (Is man basically good? How do we account for cruelty / evil behaviour?)
- the view of knowledge (How do we know the truth? How do we know good from bad and right from wrong?)

Take a few minutes to study the seven world views listed and then answer the following questions.

Which of the world views described in addendum 1 is the most common one in the health field in your home culture?

.....

List one or two examples of how the common world view of your home culture has influenced ethical thinking and behaviour regarding healthcare:

a.

.....

b.

.....

c.

.....

7 MAJOR WORLD VIEWS:

1. THEISM - Christians, Jews, Moslems. - A world in the hand of an infinite God, who is the creator.

Infinite - Limitless, unbounded, boundless, unlimited, absolute, eternal.

Basis of Ethics - Grounded in God.

Nature of Ethics - Absolute.

2. ATHEISM - A world without God.

+ Political thinking behind atheism

Liberalism - Everyone is his own God.

Democracy - The people are God.

Socialism \ communism - The state is God.

Nationalism - The nation is God.

+ Agnostic - without knowledge of God.

lives as though there is no God.

Basic of Ethics - Grounded in Man.

Nature of Ethics - Relative

3. DEISM - A world on its own, originally made by God. God is not involved in the world anymore. This view was popular 100 - 200 years ago and commonly held by people who believed in natural laws. (A law of conduct or morality supposed to be inherent in human nature and ascertainable by reason, as distinguished from law based on divine revelation or human legislation).

Basis of Ethics - Grounded in Nature. Nature of Ethics - Absolute

4. FINITE GODISM - A world with a finite (small) God, he cannot rule the world well so he needs our help.
(finite - limited, restricted, bounded).
Basis of Ethics - Grounded in God or man.
Nature of Ethics - Relative.

5. PANENTHEISM - The world is in God. There is a God. He has two parts, one in the world and one apart from the world.
Basis of Ethics - Relative
Nature of Ethics - Relative

6. PANTHEISM - The world is God, Man is God, Everything is God.
View held by Taoism, Hinduism.
Basis of Ethics - Relative
Nature of Ethics - Relative

7. POLYTHEISM. A world with many Gods, view held by Hinduism, Animism, Taoism, Mormonism.
Basis of Ethics - Relative - grounded in gods.
Nature of Ethics - Relative.

THREE PERSPECTIVES OF ETHICS COMMONLY MET IN THE HEALTH FIELD.

A. CONSEQUENTIALIST

B. NORMATIVE

C. EXISTENTIAL

THE NORMATIVE PERSPECTIVE OF ETHICS

The focus here is on the standards or norms of right and wrong that transcend particular situations or personal wishes.

- it is based on principles considered universal and absolute, applying to all people, independent of time, geography, culture or individual concerns. Eg. Do not kill.

In medical or Health Field ethics the normative questions would be:

- What determines the value of a person's life?
 - + Is it intrinsic (inherent \ internal) or is it determined by level of function?
- Is preservation of life always the main thing or is relief of suffering more important?
- What is the meaning or significance of death?
 - + Is killing ever justified?
- What rights do persons have? How are these rights defined, derived and protected?
- Can these rights be lost or forfeited?
- Who has the prerogative (right) to decide a course of action?
 - + Is it the patient, his family, the doctor, hospital administrator or society?
- What is to be done when parties disagree?
- Does the patient have absolute autonomy?
- What responsibility do we have towards one another?
 - + How are they to be enforced?

- What should be our motive in approaching difficult problems?

The Strength of the Normative perspective.

- It provides a firm standard of right and wrong.
- It provides a definite goal towards which we could direct ourselves.
- The situation is not expected to provide its own goal in some intuitively obvious manner.
- The wishes of individuals are not simply granted without regards to broader considerations.

Weaknesses or Obstacles to the establishment of the correctness of this approach.

- How are the norms derived?
- Why should they be considered universal?
- If these norms are established merely by logic or by appeal to a god of practical moral necessity, how are we to settle disagreement over the proper norms?
- How are the norms to be made binding?
- How will we handle people who will not go along with our norms, or with the idea of norms altogether?

People who ascribe to the normative perspective.

- this perspective is used in many ethical codes relating to Health Care and are based on The law of humanity, The Ten Commandments, The Torah, The Shaira /Quranic law in Islam, The Dharma in Buddhism and in Hinduism.
- Christianity is generally thought of as Normative perspective since it is based on an absolute principles communicated by God .It fits best with this perspective if it must be classified among the three. Any Christian ethical analysis must place heavy emphasis on Christian norms to be faithful to the Lord. But an approach which places exclusive emphasis on the norm is incomplete. It excludes God's sovereignty in our situation and His presence in our life.

How does Christianity answer the two main weaknesses or obstacles of the Normative Perspective? We will look at this a little later.

The pitfall.

- It is insensitive to particular situations.

THE CONSEQUENTIAL PERSPECTIVE OF ETHICS

The focus is on an understanding of the situation that faces us. - the consequences, goals, facts.

The essential element of this approach is the emphasis on the consequence of an action. This will be the judge of its rightness or wrongness. There is no universal standard of good to be applied in all situations.

- Each situation is expected to provide its own ought, so the good of two situations might differ greatly.
- Whereas the nominative is based on principles that are unconditional, those of the pure consequentialist are entirely

conditional and relative. This is the perspective which is most commonly seen in modern ethics.

This perspective answers the following questions:

1. **Consequences / Goals**

- What are the goals that each party is aiming for in this situation?
What will the short-term, long-term consequences be for all the parties involved (individuals, families, groups, society at large, future generations...)?
- What will the consequences be for the relationships between God and the relevant parties?

2. **Facts**

- What is the exact nature of the situation?
Who are the main parties involved?
Who is confused about what?
- To consider the facts in the following areas:

* **Medical**

Do all the involved parties understand the medical facts?
Are all the necessary medical facts known?
Is there a consensus among the health care professionals about the facts?
What is the patient's prognosis with / without treatment?
When does human life begin?
When is someone dead?
Who is the biological father / mother?

* **Social**

Do the involved parties know and understand enough about the patient social situation?
In what measure is this situation an example of what is happening in the society?

* **Historical**

What has happened in the past, in this instance? In others instances? Locally? Nationally?

* **Legal**

What is the law nationally, internationally?
What are the trends in jurisprudence?

* **Economical**

Do all the involved parties know and understand enough about the financial situation of the patient and the cost of the care involved?
What are the available resources?

Consequential Ethics is seen in two ways.

1. SITUATIONALISM

This is consequentialism on a small scale. It is concerned mainly with the consequence of an action on those whom it directly affects and not on the community as a whole.

- The principle of 'love' is the only binding principle in this perspective. All other norms must be abandoned in order to do the 'loving' thing. Therefore we can morally do anything we can justify as being 'loving' in a particular situation.
- In medicine, situationalism is typified by the 'risk-benefit' analysis (this method is vital to good medical practice and is not necessarily an expression of situationalism, but by itself, it is insufficient for ethical

decision-making without a normative context).

The Strength of the situationalist perspectives.

- It is sensitive to situations.
- It does not have preemptive formulas for the right thing to do.
- It fits into the relativism of the prevailing naturalistic world view, while allowing for a sense of compassion.

Weaknesses or Obstacles of this perspective -

- There is a big problem in the definition of good.
How does one establish what consequences are desirable?
Why is one result preferred to another?

The Pitfall

- The Rules are made up as you go along.

2. UTILITARIANISM

This is consequentialism on a large scale. For those who subscribe to this perspective, the collective is foremost. The consequence of an action on the individual is of secondary importance.

- It seeks to calculate the sum total of good and bad effect produced by an action. It maximizes the former and minimizes the latter.
- It emphasizes what is believed to be "the greatest good for the greatest number" and allows for public policy decisions to benefit an entire community or nation or the whole world.
- In medicine, utilitarianism arguments are often used during discussions of the allocation of expensive therapies. It is what will benefit the majority that will be given priority -not the few who can be a burden on society's resources.
- It would always be a point in favour of killing the elderly and the disabled.

The Strength of the utilitarianism perspective.

- There is a broad, even global assessment of resources, needs and other factors relevant to social justice.

Weaknesses or Obstacles of this perspective.

- Why is the collective foremost?
- How do we calculate results?
- What criteria do we have for establishing what is the greatest good for the greatest number?
- It ignores personal concerns.

Consequentialism cannot stand on its own, without appealing to a value system, by itself it falls for lack of norms.

It borrows its norms from a general consensus of a heritage such as Christianity.

The Pitfall

- Individuals are swallowed up by the collective.

THE EXISTENTIAL PERSPECTIVE OF ETHICS

The essential element of this perspective is the emphasis on the personal wish of the individual. It seeks only the autonomous fulfilment of the

individual's goal.

- It is referred to as the Egoist perspective. The egoist considers all ethical decisions as private matters and rejects accountability to any other persons, norms or consequences.
- this perspective is in line with our view of man. Our view of man influence our view of motives. If we believe that man is basically good, his motives will be good.
- The Bible says that man is fallen and that his heart is deceitful, therefore we cannot trust our human motives.
- Our motives need to be checked by the Holy Spirit in the light of the Word of God.

This perspective answers the following questions:

- What is the personal investment of each of those involved in the situation?
- What are the main motives, wishes, desires of each party involved?

In modern medicine, ethical egoism is illustrated by the abortion issue.

- In the west 97% of abortions are performed purely for personal convenience, and most are justified by this perspective. "It is my body, and you cannot tell me what to do with my body."
- The signing of the 'living will' is for the maintenance of autonomy and to eliminate dependency on our accountability to others.

Strength of this perspective or what makes it attractive.

- The existential perspective maximizes personal freedom.
- It is relativism in the extreme, insisting that one need not be accountable even to do what is in one's own best interest.
- It is suspicious of any outside constraints.
- It assumes that because we are innately (naturally) self centred, we should be free to pursue our self interest without impediments.

Weaknesses or Obstacles to the Existential perspective.

- The relentless pursuit of one's own interests is not always the best way to maximize pleasure. The Bible tells us that we are most fulfilled when we lay aside our own interests for those of others.
 - + Why is the individual always preeminent?

The Pitfalls

- Existentialism cannot be universalized for it will result in anarchy.
- It provides no sense of duty between persons.
- It undermines the rule of law.
- It destroys both public morality and the basis for medical practice.
 - + Why should we always do what we want?

THE VIRTUE PERSPECTIVE OF ETHICS

A virtue is a good moral characteristic. In the decision making process, the character of the persons involved play an important part.

This perspective is not commonly seen in the Health Field although it may be adhered to in part by some Health Field workers.

The focus is on the virtues demonstrated by and/or required from those involved in the ethical issue.

The essential element of this perspective is the placing of Jesus Christ at the centre. Jesus Christ is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords; "Every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord".

- It emphasizes Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour on a personal level: Phil 3:8.

- + Is Jesus Christ your personal Lord Saviour?
- It emphasizes Jesus Christ as Lord of all. Eph. 1:20-22
 - + Is Jesus Christ the Lord of the health field in your city, province, country?
- It emphasizes Jesus Christ as the treasurer keeper of all wisdom and knowledge. Cor. 2:3.
 - + Do you know Christ's treasures of knowledge, also regarding the health field?
- It emphasizes Jesus Christ as the definite model of Ethical Behaviour.
 - John 13:15 - "I have given you an example to follow".
 - John 20:21 - "As the father sent me, I also sent you".

What virtues did Jesus model?

- + Compassion, love, mercy, righteousness, patience, justice, humility, courage, holiness; Gal 5:22,23; 1 Cor.13.
- It emphasizes Jesus Christ as the exclusive and unique life giver. John 1:4. 'In Him was life and the life was the light of men'. John 14:6. 'I am the way the truth and the life'.
- It emphasizes the 4 Cardinal Virtues according to the Ancient Greek Philosophers.
 - + **Justice:** a fair distribution of costs and benefits; giving to others what is due to them
 - + **Prudence:** a due regard for one's own welfare and wisdom in handling one's affairs
 - + **Temperance:** a moderate way of life and self control
 - + **Courage:** the ability to face danger for the sake of principle
- It emphasizes the 3 Theological virtues.
 - + **Faith:** the confidence of the unseen truths of God are real
 - + **Hope:** the view that the future will be superior in a significant way to the past
 - + **Love:** one ought to give of oneself and one's skill to others in need

FOUNDATIONS OF A BIBLICAL CHRISTIAN APPROACH TO ETHICS

A Biblical Christian approach to ethics:

- is based on the character of God Himself and on His relationship to His creation.

God has primarily made Himself known through His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ. He is the model for us to follow. (John 13:15). He expressed the virtue perspective. Jesus Christ came to manifest the glory of God. (God's glory is the sum total of God's goodness, and it is the character of God). In Christ Jesus all the fullness of the God head dwells in bodily form. This revelation of who God is forms the first major perspective of a Biblical Christian approach to ethics. ie Virtue Ethics.

The relationship between God and His creation is one of Lordship. His

Lordship has three major elements: **Control, Authority, Presence.**

These three elements are the sources of the other three major perspectives of a Biblical-Christian approach to ethics.

Presence = with us and our motives = **existential perspective**

Control = knows and controls the situation = **situational perspective**

Authority = has authority to prescribe norms = **normative perspective**

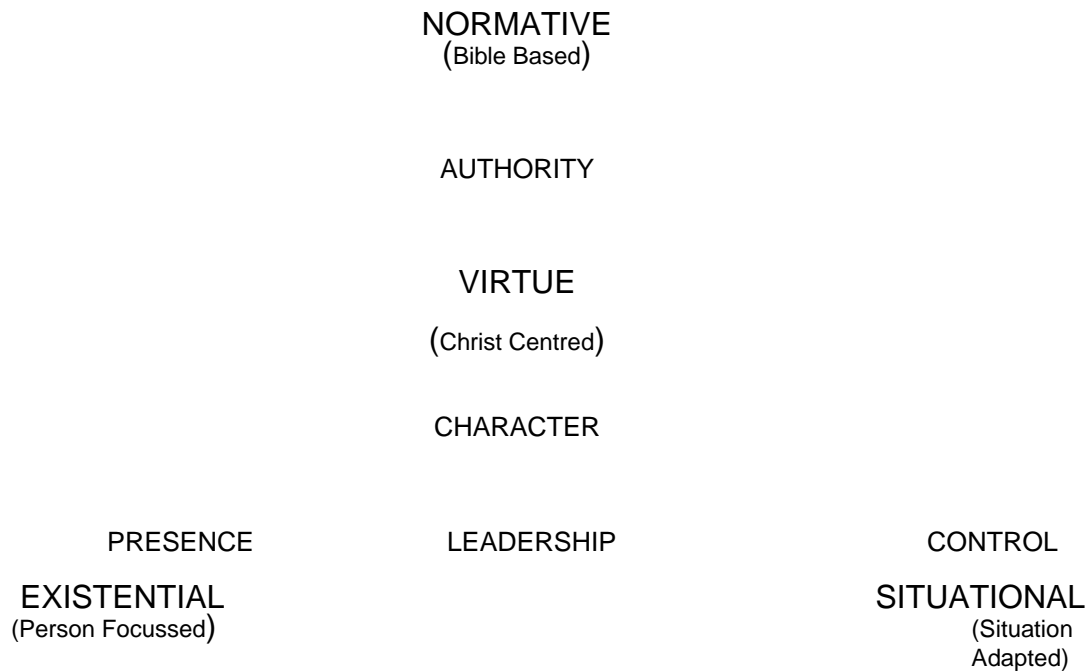
- is balanced and deals thoroughly with each of the above-mentioned four perspectives. Thus it makes a serious attempt at discovering the wisdom of God so that we may live accordingly.
- is practical and not merely theoretical
- is based on the Bible, and not human behaviour, thought systems or philosophies.
- is an attempt to provide a systematic description of the will of God about the relationships between human beings in light of His revealed will, the Bible. This means that there will be a continuous battle between the Biblical-Christian view of ethics and most other approaches of ethics.

Because God is sovereign "working out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will" - The situation we find ourselves in should be considered carefully. He does not require that we apply His norms in a vacuum, but He sovereignly places us in circumstances where they will apply. He does not make faithfulness to His perfect law impossible at any time, but promises to find a way out, 1 Cor. 10:13, thus Christianity accounts well for the situation.

Our personal concerns are of interest to God. The fact that He is always present with us in every situation demonstrates this Matt 28:20. He has asked us to cast our cares upon Him. 1 Peter 5:7.

He gives us discernment through spiritual maturity Heb. 5:14, and Prayer James 1:5. God does not scorn out deepest desires and needs like a detached lawgiver. He does not want us to apply His Truth mechanically, out of duty alone, but He instructs us to do it with the right motive. God dwells with us and we abide in Him John 15:5. Thus the existential concerns find a solid foundation.

* A Biblical model for medical ethics requires that we take into account the whole counsel of God as revealed in scripture so that we faithfully discharge the responsibility He has given us.
We should not violate any clear Biblical norm.
We should choose and carry out a contextually appropriate course of action with proper motives.



A Biblical Medical Ethics must be:
Bible Based = Normative Perspective - GOD'S AUTHORITY
Situation Adapted = Situational Perspective - GOD IN CONTROL
Person Oriented = Existential Perspective - GOD'S PRESENCE
Christ Centred = Virtue Perspective - CHRIST'S CHARACTER

HOW TO PRACTICE BIBLICAL MEDICAL ETHICS

- 1 **Choose to glorify God - through every aspect of our daily life.**
 - seek God's righteousness Matt. 6:33.
 - have God's fear in our heart Pro. 1:7
- 2 **Know the requirements of our task**
 - be professionally competent and integrate Biblical truths.
- 3 **Pray to receive wisdom.** James 1:5
- 4 **Develop a pattern of thinking in line with Biblical Truths.** Rom. 12:2
- 5 **Take time to understand the dilemma we are facing.**
 - a. What are the relevant norms to this situation? Normative Perspective. (To search the Scriptures)
 - b. What are the facts and the consequences? Situational Perspective
 - c. What are the motives of the involved persons? Existential Perspective
 - d. What are the relevant virtues in this situation? Virtue Perspective
- 6 **Develop alternatives.**
 - It involves all the body of Christ. (network)
 - It implies humility, no one, no organization has the solution to all the problems.
 - God is raising up compassion ministry in His Body.
- 7 **Be aware of the motive on which a law is based.**
 - First there is a trend in the society to move from God and His laws - (move from the normative perspective).
 - When a law is passed in a country, it is very often in the context of situational perspective. (e.g. focuses on the consequences of illegal abortion).
 - When the law is in operation in a country, it is used in the context of existential perspective. (e.g. 97% of abortions in Europe are for personal conveniences).

The egoist approach leads to the destruction of the moral basis of a profession and a society. In other words it leads to anarchy.

±
÷

**ANYTHING WHICH STARTS WITH MAN IS CONDEMNED TO FAIL.
ANYTHING WHICH IS TAKEN AS ABSOLUTE OUTSIDE OF GOD
HIMSELF IS CONDEMNED TO FAIL (NORMS, GOD'S LAWS,
SITUATIONS, MOTIVATION).**

Bibliography:

Cook, D.; The Moral Maze: A Way of Exploring Christian Ethics: SPCK, London; 1983; 177 pages; ISBN 0-281 -04038-9.

Frame, JM; Perspectives on the Word of God: An Introduction to Christian Ethics: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, Philipsbury, New Jersey; 1990; 66 pages; ISBN 0-87552-244-0.

Hiemburger ,D.C. ; A Biblical Model for Medical Ethics; Journal of Biblical Ethics in Medicine, Vol .1, Number 2, April 1987, p. 22 -27.

Cook, D.; The Moral Maze: A Way of Exploring Christian Ethics: SPCK, London; 1983; 177 pages; ISBN 0-281 -04038-9.

Frame, JM; Perspectives on the Word of God: An Introduction to Christian Ethics: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, Philipsbury, New Jersey; 1990; 66 pages; ISBN 0-87552-244-0.

Hiemburger ,D. C. ; A Biblical Model for Medical Ethics; Journal of Biblical Ethics in Medicine, Vol .1, Number 2, April 1987, p. 22 -27.

HCFI Workbook - Biblical Christian Medical Ethics - compiled by Dr Chris Steyn.