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Reformation

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Hence it comes that faith alone makes righteous and ful-
fills the law out of Christ's merit. It brings the Spirit, and the
Spirit makes the heart glad and free, as the law requires
that it shall be.   *Martin Luther*

Our return to obedience is indeed the aim of free grace. It
is for this that it makes us free.   *Karl Barth*

Obedience without freedom is slavery; freedom without
obedience is arbitrary self-will. Obedience restrains free-
dom; and freedom ennobles obedience.
                                            Dietrich Bonhoeffer

33

The most important gift for the church today is teach-
ing, teaching, and more teaching!" This emphatic state-
ment by John R. Stott in a graduate seminar in 1994 came in
response to a student's query about what spiritual gifts the
church needs today.[1] Stott's remark reflects his larger con-
cern that amidst glowing reports of evangelical advance-
ment, ignorance and distortion of the basic Gospel mes-
sage characterize much of its new life and leadership.

With Stott, many of us observe with alarm a distortion
and "dumbing down" of doctrine and life. One issue striking
at the core of this concern is how Christians continue to iso-
late theology from their ethics.[2] This view resides in semi-
naries where Christian ethics is taught as an elective, not a
topic intrinsic to the theological curriculum. The result is
God viewed only as the "foundation," not the source and
substance of ethics. Driving it is the artificial idea that theol-
ogy is speculative and ethics is practical. But is not our think-
ing about God a matter of obedience or disobedience? Does
it not lead to lifestyle choices? If so, it is ethical!

This focus is manifested in the contemporary church
scene where "things theological" are ruled out on the
grounds that the pulpit must emphasize "real life" issues. But
is a sound Christology or Soteriology not relevant to real life?
Alister McGrath advises us here on a basic point:

> In order for anyone . . . to make informed *moral* decisions, it
> is necessary to have a set of values concerning human life.
> Those values are determined by *beliefs*, and those beliefs are
> stated as *doctrines*. Christian doctrine thus provides a fun-
> damental framework for Christian living.[3]

The problem is faulty thinking about how living relates to
knowing. Since medieval times, ethics and theology often
existed as separate categories. But if Scripture is our norm

for faith and life, this assumption must be challenged.

The theme and purpose of this essay address the ethics-versus-theology issue through the question: What do we really mean when we speak of a "Christian ethic"? The interest is theological, not philosophical,[4] with an ethically oriented approach. Though this starting point may seem hazardous, the destination is not, for both ethics and doctrine are, in the end and throughout, inseparable.

Importance of the Issue

This theme is important first because from outside and inside the church, we face pressures to engage moral concerns. As secularism tears deeper into our cultural fabric, and evangelicalism floats towards confessional ambiguity, we tremble at the prospects of our culture collapsing around us. With the psalmist, we cry, "What can the righteous *do*?" The angst provokes many to choose activism to resist change, or protectionism to avoid change, or a defeatism that finally surrenders to change and suspends ethical judgments in the face of moral, legal and technical perplexities.

Not helping is Christian ethics taught apart from any theological vision and given piecemeal according to the latest crisis, and then often too late. The more we absorb society's values, the more we tolerate and imitate sub-Christian standards. When pushed to choose, theology is presumed inadequate to be of much practical assistance in the midst of challenges.

Second, it is important because the logic of the Christian faith demands that believers "be who they are" under the lordship of Christ. In the interaction between knowing and living, two key principles emerge: How we think about God affects how we live before God, and, conversely, how we live before God affects how we think about God. Doctrine is unto life, and life is unto doctrine. The great challenge to ethics is not the sifting through positions past and present, but in

coming to grips with the weight of obligation in our souls to *live* theologically before God.

After a brief historical sketch of how theology and ethics have fared over time, a definition of "Christian ethics" will be offered. This will be followed by a look at five essential characteristics that depict the true nature of Christian ethics.[5]

Historical Contours in Protestant Ethics

Before the Reformation, medieval theology, building on Aristotle, separated nature from grace. Nature served as a substructure to reality. There, reason and natural law formed the bases for ethics. Grace formed the superstructure where sacred theology supplemented ethics to make the virtuous life more Christian. In this scheme, ethics was separate from theology. The common virtues were still accessible to man. The theological virtues were added gifts by God infused into man. With such virtuous property, man, by effort, was able to improve his character and gain merit before God. This kind of ability tended to create an independent orientation to life.

The Reformation sounded a major shift. Luther heralded the change: "Good works do not make a man good, but a good man does good works." Though Aristotle's wisdom lingered, *sola scriptura* and Augustinian grace took priority. Life was God-centered with true righteousness flowing from the Gospel of Christ. Ethics, built on law and patterned after the Decalogue, was the domain of theology and recast within Sanctification. Ethics and theology were united. In Calvin, Christian life moved from a virtue-ethic built with self-improvement to a duty-ethic that expressed holiness and love in the realism of daily affairs. Such works validated faith and, in terms of vocational pursuit, were interpreted as a service to God.

In the Puritan era, with the expanding doctrine of the covenant, Christian ethics developed with the intent of man-

ifesting God's glory in the details of life. Sinclair Ferguson sums up the change:

> [D]uring the sixteenth century covenant theology came to be regarded as a key to the interpretation of *Scripture* and, during the seventeenth century, a key to the interpretation of *Christian experience.*[6]

The goal of Christian ethics was to promote a godly piety while avoiding a new legalism. How closely ethics was tied to doctrine depended on whether the intellect (Dutch) or the will (English) assumed the priority. William Ames, who rejected Aristotle, viewed theology as an art for everyman and defined it as "the doctrine of living to God."[7] Ames divided his *Marrow of Divinity* into "faith" and "observance" to mirror covenant thought, the latter forming his introduction to ethics. His "cases of conscience" aimed at building assurance, then addressed many practical matters about life before God and neighbors. Theology and ethics became virtually equivalent.

The eighteenth century onward witnessed the slow shift away from theism to a man-centered ethic. With Kant's rational view of duty, Schleiermacher's subjectivist idea of religious feeling, or some cultural agenda, theology was revised to fit within reason. Being denied a God-centered and revelational basis, orthodox theology was reduced to ethics. These views gave rise to the nineteenth-century growth of liberalism with its secularized view of God, optimistic view of man, energetic social ethic and salvation by good works.[8]

Twentieth-century neoorthodoxy rejected the bankrupt ethics of liberalism. A personalist ethic arose centering on Christ the Word. Ethics returned to theology. Yet, for all the stress on grace, it failed to reclaim the biblical fidelity of the Reformation. The law-in-gospel scheme, where law is a form of the Gospel, resulted in an ethic of command grounded not

upon the content of revealed morality, but on a direct encounter of divine reality. The reaction it provoked actually brought about an ethic absorbed into theology.

Today, the relation of ethics to theology is ambiguous. Neoorthodox theology has faded, but its ethic lives on in mixed theories and borrowed secular sources.[9] Love as a self-defining norm, rules incorporated when useful, professional and socio-political structures are all emphasized. Themes on the Spirit, holiness and the church are often absent. Such ethics has aided evangelicalism, as in medical discussions, but a warning arises. Its eclectic nature will in time undermine its theological stance.

Throughout these swings of modern history, orthodox Protestant ethics, though marginalized, remained largely intact. Recently, though, it too began exploring ways to state afresh "Christian ethics," and in ways that distinguish it from sub-Christian models. One key point is in a definition of ethics. To that we now turn.

Christian Ethics: A Definition

A definition is important because how we think of ethics determines our approach to ethical problems. Ethics is the study of the principles of conduct, and stems from *ethos* (Gk.) meaning, "customary pattern of conduct."[10] "Bad company corrupts good character" (1 Cor. 15:33) is the only passage on ethics making a moral judgment on Christian terms. Another New Testament word, *anastrophe*, means "way of life," and more aptly describes a Christian ethic as it includes qualities like "goodness, purity and holiness."[11] Defining ethics must reflect God's will as approved by Scripture. Since Scripture itself claims not only to be sufficient for determining norms (2 Tim. 3:16-17), but also for warning against elevating man-made traditions (Col. 2:7-8), to it we must now turn.

Both Testaments unite doctrine and ethics. First, the Old

Testament views ethics, whether in the pronouncement of law in story, proverb or precept, as principles cradled within God's redemptive plan. The Decalogue is a prime example (Deut. 5:6-21; Exod. 20:2-17). Here, the Law is given within a framework of grace as seen in the Lord's delivery of His people from Egypt. The covenant theme, "I will be your God and you will be My people" (Ezek. 34:30; 36:28; Jer. 31:33-34), places Israel's obedience as a response to divine promise. In short, throughout God's revelatory covenant includes commandments.

Second, the New Testament depicts the same reality. Here, ethical instruction is given in the context of kingly reign and new covenantal life. John the Baptist demands that fruits of repentance accompany belief (Luke 3:7-14). Jesus reiterates in various ways that a true disciple possesses the word *and* does it (John 14:21). The blessed are "those who hear the Word of God *and* observe it" (Luke 11:28; cf. Matt. 5:16; 7:21). James warns us against being deceived by a religion that permits hearing, but does not press us to be "doers of the word" (James 1:26).

Such biblical examples are sufficient to show that in Scripture, "knowing is for living."[12] What is not in Scripture are separate categories of "theological" and "ethical." Nor is ethics tagged on to theology like pinning the tail on the donkey. What occurs is a way of life that rises out of doctrine and is a living extension of doctrine. With the above in mind let us move to a definition.

First, Christian ethics is not a "branch" of general ethics. A definition of ethics that is arrived at by first determining the ethical postulates common to mankind, then, secondly, adding to this universal a religious distinctive, is skewed from the start. Such a set-up provokes the old "morality"-versus- "religion" debate, and views "ethics" as some free-floating phenomenon where, with study, conclusions are reached that are deemed acceptable for man, though the Creator and

Lawgiver of life is ignored. The God who creates and governs reality is not an "add on" to ethics. Nor can the "good" be defined apart from acknowledging His will and nature.

Second, a preferred definition will reflect scriptural approval, presenting it as part and parcel with systematic theology, notably the doctrine of Sanctification. It may then be defined as such:

> Ethics is the study of the way of life that conforms to and imitates God and His will as revealed in Christ and Scripture with the goal of deepening man's covenantal relationship with God and man.[13]

With this definition in mind, we now advance to unfold five key characteristics that attest to its center, source and substance.

Five Characteristics of a Christian Ethic

First, a Christian ethic is a theological ethic. By "theological" I do not mean ethics as the domain of theologians. I mean ethics is rooted in the doctrine of God's will and character. Ethics is not "autonomous," but "heteronomous," that is, we live *under* God's rule and goodness and are subject to His claims. Since God is the Norm, ethics is God-centered: "In the beginning *God* . . . ." (Gen. 1:1), who is "Lord of heaven and earth," who "gives all men life and breath and everything else" (Acts 19:24-25). Ethics is being "imitators of God" (Eph. 5:1), living "in order to please God" (1 Thess. 4:1).[14]

Rooting ethics in the living and triune God means He establishes human life, reveals its standards, determines its value, defines its purpose, sustains its existence, reverses its predicament and directs its destiny. Though ethics deals with man, the starting point and abiding reference is God "in whom we live, and move and have our being" (Acts 19:28). This characteristic presses Christian "ethics" beyond cor-

rect conduct to Christian "life," or godliness.

Critical here are God's attributes of sovereignty, change-lessness and holiness.

God is the sovereign Lord. He exercises sovereignty through His authority, power and control over all our affairs. He alone wills what is the Good. No genuine good exists otherwise. Calvin writes,

> For His [God's] will is, and rightly ought to be, the cause of all things that are. For if it has any cause, something must precede it, to which it is, as it were bound; this is unlawful to imagine. For God's will is so much *the highest rule of righteousness* that whatever He wills, by that very fact that He wills it, must be considered righteous.[15]

As the "highest rule of righteousness," God's will, rooted in the divine moral character, is the basis for all norms for ethics.

God is also changeless, and therefore is ever consistent. He is faithful to His relationships and stands reliably behind what He wills to be good and right for His people. This quality is critical to accentuate given dubious forms of Christian ethics which permit a changing of norms according to the situation. Such ethics infers not only a changing revelation, but a changing God. Scripture, in touching on moral issues, will often focus on this divine attribute (cf. Mal. 3:6; James 1:17; Heb. 13:8).

Further, God is most holy. Because God is "holy, holy, holy" (Isa. 6:3), we must reflect "a holy life" (1 Peter 1:15). His holiness shines in the moral metaphor of "light" (1 John 1:5), which grants to God the absolute right to guide us in what is good and evil, right and wrong (Heb. 5:11-14). God's will is rooted in His holy nature. The good that God wills is the good that belongs to His holy being. Ethically, His holiness highlights His righteousness and purity. To deny God's holi-

ness as basic sets up a false dichotomy between law and love. God's acts of love are holy acts. Our love for others, therefore, ought never to undermine purity.

Finally, a correspondence exists between God and man because man is created in God's image. God made man out of His goodness, and desires that such goodness be mirrored freely. The image is basic to personal dignity, worth and respect. In his conscience resides a moral knowledge of God (Rom. 2:14-15). The qualities of "true righteousness and holiness" (Eph. 4:24) describe the moral content of the image by way of the "new man" in Christ. Man was created with the responsibility, thus the capacity, to obey God.[16] In sin, man retains this responsibility and cannot possibly escape from it. Only in Christ, the perfect image of God, is his image restored.

Second, a Christian ethic is a biblical ethic. A genuine ethic is rooted in the God who acts and has spoken. The Lord has revealed His will objectively in Scripture.[17] As God's revelation, Scripture is authoritative and provides permanent data on moral truth. This truth comes to us through law, redemptive history and fulfillment, examples from Jesus, and many stories with moral themes. With the Spirit providing insight and power these can be understood properly and practiced wisely. The norm for our manner of life then is what the Scriptures approve.

In 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Paul grounds ethics exclusively in the Word of God. Because "all Scripture" is God-breathed, what Scripture says, God says. As such, Scripture is "useful" as a sufficient and practical tool for discipline, and "for training in righteousness" to equip believers "for every good work." The Bible then is given so we can learn the ways of God and be guided in righteous living.

A biblical ethic derives its validity from the Bible's own divine authority. This standard is the will of God and is declared clearly in the Ten Commandments. In Reformed

ethics, specifically, the Decalogue stands as an abiding pattern for life once (1) the unity of the Old and New Testaments, and (2) the continuity of the moral law as a complement to the Gospel (Matt. 5:17-20)[18] are granted. Three interpretative rules apply:

(1) Every prohibition includes a commandment; (2) Each transgression includes all other similar transgressions; (3) The condemnation of an outward sin also involves the condemnation of the corresponding inner motive or desire.[19]

The progress from the Old to the New Testament is the progress from promise to fulfillment. Law as a rule for life is harmonious with the Gospel. Law then belongs with love, for love itself is given as a command, and is not given as a self-regulating standard for life. Love provides the motive for the application of Law in good works.

The structure of the Decalogue denotes first our love and duty to God, then to our neighbor. Love to God precedes and is the source of our love to others. What is important is that though there are two tables, there is only one ethic. This is summarily repeated in Christ's twofold command to love God and neighbor (Matt. 22:37-40).

A biblical ethic provides a realism about the extent of sin and the judgment of God. The Bible alone accurately depicts the degree of man's depravity and accountability before God. As created beings we are limited, and as fallen beings we are lawless and faithless. A biblical realism counters naive views of human moral perfectibility and strips away the myth that problems are primarily external, not internal (Mark 7:34-35). It assures us that His judgment on moral rebellion is not just future but operates within the fabric of life (Rom. 1:18-32). Such knowledge ought to provoke a new humility and a sober watchfulness about how and when we speak and act.

Third, the Christian ethic is an evangelical ethic. The message and power of the Gospel are intricately tied to Christian morality. Ethics then is Christ-magnifying. Law remains Law, and its principles and applications are not abandoned, nor are they mechanically applied. The New Testament teaches a degree of moral development from old to new covenant obedience. We now relate to the Law through Christ, who fulfilled and intensified it, and who, through His sanctifying Spirit, forms in us the right motivation to grasp and apply its content.[20] How does the Gospel shape ethics?

Ethics rests within the Gospel. If sinful man is to conform to God's will and be pleasing in His sight, he must be converted. The Lord did not abandon his creation to the corruption of sin and evil. His purpose to restore all things to Himself never faded. In His Son, the True Man, God came to identify with us and, through obedience, offered Himself upon a cross to save us. By faith in Jesus Christ and His atoning work, we are justified, reconciled, adopted by God. Now, we, too, enter into the new obedience, or *life of sanctification*, to become conformed to Christ's image in accord with God's will.

Ethics is transformed by the Gospel. The Gospel is more than a doctrine! It is Christ's power experienced through the Spirit. The change a person undergoes, therefore, is not just a visible adjustment of conduct. The Gospel penetrates and transforms a person's identity. We are made "a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17; 1 Peter 1:22-23). As new people, we are revitalized "to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age" (Titus 2:12). Jesus condemned the Pharisees because their displays of righteous conduct were driven by the self-seeking motives of a false heart (Matt. 6:4). Christ is concerned then with the kind of people we are inwardly as well as outwardly.

Ethics reflects the Gospel. In imitating Jesus, we do not just say, "Do what Jesus would do." Jesus' identity, office and mission were unique, thus restricting His example for us. The apostles looked to Jesus as a source for guidance and noted that He "learned obedience" from His trials (Heb. 5:8; cf. Phil. 2:8). They exhort us to "follow in His steps" (1 Peter 2:21; 1 Cor. 13). One clear example of Christ's "steps" for us is in His obedience: "I came down from heaven not to do My own will but the will of Him who sent Me" (John 6:38). The Father's will involved speaking and doing (John 12:49-50).[21] A second example is Christ's primacy placed on love (Matt. 22:37-40). His love is a correlate to His commandments. As Jesus' love acts in obedience, so in love, we obey (John 13:34-35). Ethics is "redemptive" in that we promote another's good.

Fourth, the Christian ethic is a doxological ethic. The term "doxology" refers to worship with the emphasis on God's glory. Paul writes that "whatever you do" it is for God's glory (1 Cor. 10:31). If Christian ethics centers on loving God then our primary duty is the exaltation of God in all of life. Carl F. H. Henry states,

To love God with one's whole being is to worship the self-revealing God alone, to give no adoration to idols, and not to take God's name in vain but to hold its majesty inviolably sacred.[22]

As worship and love to God are intricately linked, ethics, which also encompasses love to God, has a doxological character.

The ethical character of worship serves as a warning to many forms of contemporary evangelical worship which tend to be self-centered. It warns us that true worship is not primarily something emotive but is accompanied with a moral imperative. The imperative is the demand of loyalty.[23]

Indeed, worship that fails to prompt us with a sense of loyalty to serve others, especially in God's household, is unacceptable to God.

All this is magnified in Romans 12:1-2. After expounding on the Christian faith (1-11), Paul turns to the Christian life (12-15:13) that must follow. His ethic is truly theocentric. A new level of purpose and life commitment flows from faith and gratitude for the gospel. Romans 12:1-2 center around "reasonable worship," a phrase tied in with "offer your bodies" (v.1).[24] The only kind of worship "reasonable" to offer to God is an *active* worship where our lives, body and soul are consecrated in service to Him. Cranfield writes, "The true worship God desires embraces the whole of the Christian's life from day to day." The goal of all is the discernment of and obedience to God's will, which is good, in accordance with His commandments, and perfect in every way.[25]

Fifth, the Christian ethic is a covenantal ethic. First of all, it is meaningless to speak merely of "our relationship to God." The Bible is never so vague. Scripture presses us to specify what kind of relationship exists. The kind of divine-human relationship found throughout is a covenantal one. The "covenant" with God's people is a mutually binding compact sovereignly made by the Lord Himself. At its center is a promise that calls for our conscious response of trust, love and obedience. As a covenantal bond draws together both personal and corporate dimensions of life so do these dimensions come under obligation. Such obligation is sanctioned by judgment for disobedience and blessing for obedience.[26]

To start, covenant links ethics with faith. "I will be your God, and you will be My people" (Lev. 26:12).[27] The bond is declarative and accentuates God's promise with His people. God's promise is of grace and prompts man's duty, or the obligations of grace. By its very design the covenant bridges the dilemma of the "is" and the "ought." In the covenantal

structure, they are harmoniously bonded.

The covenant also intensifies ethics because it resides within renewing grace. The force of law is stronger because the covenant mindset moves ethics beyond a "rule-ethic" with its stress on moral order and contractual loyalty to a grace-ethic with the stress on fidelity. Fidelity, or covenant-keeping, stirs a deeper sense of obligation because of its implied connectedness and, as such, highlights the very character of the Gospel. Conversely, sin is not only rule-breaking. The wound is deeper, and the violation is more flagrant. It is covenant-breaking, and it dishonors His very name.

Further, covenant fosters true community. Placing ethics within the dynamic of covenantal life heightens the already relational nature of ethics, drawing out explicitly the corporate dimensions of moral responsibility. To foster the corporate nature of life heightens the awareness of the church as an ethical community. Thus, moral responsibility is not expressed in individualistic terms. The covenant directs individuality purposefully because it directs it outwardly as also upwardly. This outward thrust is such because the covenant defines individuality within, not apart from, biblical community. Believers are not only "in Christ," but at the same time "in Christ's body." Our discipleship then must never be abstracted from the sense and duty of membership in the church.[28]

More so, covenant stresses an ethic of personhood. The person is a central tenet of Christian ethics. At the center of a covenantal relationship with God is the face-to-face fellowship with Him in the Person, Jesus Christ. This is the joy of God's image-bearer. It is also where motives and virtues connect with duty. God promises, "You will be *My people*." This prompts the question: "What kind of people are the people of God to be?" We are to "be imitators of God" and, particularly, imitators of Christ. By the sanctifying Spirit, good works (doing) and character (being) serve each other.

Especially in community is character developed, for therein is modeled what moral maturity looks like. There, we are placed in specific roles which require certain behaviors, and we mentor others by modeling virtue: keeping promises, honoring commitments, speaking to edify, showing forgiveness and such examples. This shape to Christian ethics emerges when developed covenantally.[29]

These five characteristics highlight the God-centered reality of Christian ethics. The term that best captures the profile of Christian ethics is *godliness*. J. I. Packer gives a good summary:

> Godliness means responding to God's revelation in trust and obedience, faith and worship, prayer and praise, submission and worship. Life must be seen and lived in the light of God's Word.[30]

In conclusion, a Christian ethic that pleases God will reflect His word and conform to His Christ. It is shaped by the reality of the triune God who is our covenantal Lord. As such, Christian ethics is really Christian life. Before God and man, knowing and living are both ethical pursuits. Ethics is the covenant life of the new man in Christ. Theology is ethical because theology is life; it is who we are as sanctified people; it is what we think, say and do as bearers of His image. This makes the relationship between theology and ethics more than a unity. The bond is one of virtual identity.

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Endnotes

1 John R. Stott uttered these words in the context of a question-and-answer session during a doctoral student seminar held at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in February 1994.

2 My use of "theology" in this essay is equivalent to "doctrine" or "dogmatics," though I know some see theology as a category broader than doctrine.

3 Alister E. McGrath, "Doctrine and Ethics," *JETS*, 34 (1991): 145-56 (emphasis added). "It is doctrine that explains why and how Jesus' words and deeds have divine rather than purely human authority" (p. 148).

4 For an introduction, see essay by Basil Mitchell, "Is There a Distinctive Christian Ethic?" in William J. Abraham and Robert W. Prevost, eds., *How To Play Theological Ping-Pong* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 42-56.

5 Whether I speak of "Christian ethics" or just "ethics," unless otherwise designated, the meaning will be the same, i.e., the manner of life is defined by the reality of God. Additionally, "ethics" and "morality" are used interchangeably here.

6 Sinclair B. Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 20.

7 William Ames, *The Marrow of Sacred Divinity, Drawne Out of the Holy Scriptures, and the Interpreters thereof, and Brought into Method* (London, 1643), I:1. Cf. Keith L. Springer, *The Learned Doctor William Ames: Dutch Backgrounds of English and American Puritanism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972).

8 Cf. Stanley Hauerwas, "On Keeping Theological Ethics Theological" in *Against the Nations: War and Survival in a Liberal Society* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 23-50. Hauerwas notes that the phrase, "Christian ethics," is borrowed from the social gospel

movement, which coined the term in a distinct way at the turn of the century. The intent was to highlight an independent realm of "morality" to which religion could be variously related. It was also used as an effective mode of discourse to address social concern and the building of a social order. As such, Christian ethics was taught in liberal Protestant seminaries under the rubric of sociology (pp. 26-35).

9 A recent example of such tensions is found in David K. Clark and Robert V. Rakestraw, eds., *Readings in Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1994), though not all the essays reflect this ambiguity.

10 John Murray, *Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1957), 11; David C. Jones, *Biblical Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1994), 14n.

11 Murray, p. 11. See 1 Timothy 4:12; Hebrews 13:7; 1 Peter 1:15, 18.

12 Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Know Your Christian Life* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1981), 1-8. "The Convention that Christian doctrine matters for Christian living is one of the most important *growth points* for the Christian life," 1.

13 This definition comes as a result of the author's reflection on works by William Ames, John Murray, Clyde Jones and John Frame.

14 William Ames, *The Marrow*, I:1. "Since the highest kind of life for a human being is that which approaches closely the living and life-giving God, the nature of theological life is living to God."

15 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 Vols., trans. by Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), III, xxiii, 2.

16 Philip Edgcombe Hughes, *The True Image: The Origin and Destiny of Man in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans

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Publishing Company, 1989), 60. "Man . . . created in the divine image, has a moral obligation which at the same time is a moral incentive, namely, to promote the will of his Creator. Morally constituted, he is by nature morally responsible."

17 It is important not to separate the living Word and the recorded or written word that contains it. The relationship can be likened to a plastic record disc and the voice or vocal music recorded on it. When the needle operates properly (i.e., faith), the voice is heard, in fact every part of the disc surface contains the voice. Once recorded the two are impossible to separate. More so, the voice is in the record whether or not it is played; it does not "become" a record only when played. Scripture is the Word of God whether faith is applied to it or not.

18 See the brief but helpful essay by David Clowney, "The Use of the Bible in Ethics," in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic: A Tradition, A Challenge, A Debate,* ed. by Harvie M. Conn (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 213-24.

19 *Institutes,* II: 8, 6-10.

20 Clowney, "The Use of the Bible in Ethics," 218. "Having trusted Christ, who fulfilled the Law for us, the same Law now shapes our gratitude as Christ keeps the spirit of it in us."

21 John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray,* Vol. 2 (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 181. "The keeping of commandments and obedience are . . . witnessed to by our Lord and the inspired writers as defining his character and conduct."

22 Carl F. H. Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1957), 334.

23 Raymond Brown, *The Message of Hebrews,* in The Bible Speaks Today Series (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1982), 84. "What is the point of offering our praise to God, if the words we use are merely slick

and religiously appropriate phrases which do not in fact represent our hearts' love and obedience?"

24 David Peterson, "Worship and Ethics in Romans 12," *Tyndale Bulletin,* 44 (1993), 272-81.

25 C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans,* Vol. 2, in The International Critical Commentary Series (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979), 595-611.

26 Often covenantal language today limits itself to relational and communal language while soft-pedaling the moral and legal elements. But trust entails obligations to submit to God's claims, which are moral and legal claims as well as claims of love and grace. When we say, "I believe in You and trust You, O Lord!" we also say, "Your will controls us and we submit to it, for we belong to You!" God establishes the covenant; it is His work, not some human idea with recommendations and negotiated terms. Thus, He sanctions His commandments, and these commandments will be honored—by God. Where there is trust and obedience, God honors with blessing; where there is unbelief and disobedience, God honors with judgment which reflects the holiness of His law and nature. Both actions magnify His glory. This is how God reveals Himself in the Bible, and this is how He relates to His sinful people. Indeed, one area of the church wherein this facet of covenantal life is neglected is in the absence of church discipline. Apart from how it is handled, the fact remains that discipline is a mark of the Reformation church. Is there a link here between our theology and our church practice?

27 Leviticus 26:12 = 2 Corinthians 6:16; see also Jeremiah 7:23; 11:4; 32:28; 30:22; 31:33; Ezekiel 37:27; Revelation 21:3.

28 The individualistic approach to discipleship has long been an aberration of some of the popular parachurch ministries. I clearly recall one man who on an intense

work-study discipleship course in the summer was routinely discouraged in going to corporate worship on the weekends at his local church. The assumption seemed to be that time at the local church was an unnecessary distraction to the serious pursuit of discipleship going on within their own campus.

29 Stephen Mathonnet-Vanderwell, "Virtue in the Covenant Community: Can Virtue Ethics Revive Reformed Church Discipline?" *Reformed Review*, 49, no. 3 (1996), 195-207. Though the relational emphasis is overly strong, the article is still of value in pondering the moral impact of relationships in the church.

30 J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 16.