

Introduction to Christian Ethics
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Unit #7 Key Ethical Themes in the Teaching of Jesus
7A Faith and Obedience – The Starting Point

- In Unit #5 we examined the Biblical evidence establishing that:
 - ❖ believers are no longer under the authority of the Law; but instead
 - ❖ are required to live by the ethical teachings of Jesus.
- In Unit #6 we saw that:
 - ❖ Jesus is the second and greater Moses who has changed our ethical responsibilities by deepening and illuminating them; and
 - ❖ His authority as our ethical legislator or lawgiver has strong foundations.

- In the unit we are beginning today, Unit 7, we will be exploring **key ethical themes** in the teaching of Jesus.
- I struggled quite a bit with deciding which theme in Jesus' ethical teaching we should examine first.
- **It seemed obvious that we would have to begin with something that Jesus commanded; but which command should it be?**
- It would have to be a very basic, important and essential command.
- Q: Which of His teachings would you have chosen as our starting point?**
- A: [DISCUSS and write suggestions on white board]**
- Let me give you a hint as to the teaching that I chose.
- I asked myself if any one of His commands is more basic and foundational than any other I might choose.
- I settled on a command that only a Christian would pick as foundational to the teaching of Jesus.
- A non-Christian would be unlikely even to include it in a study of the ethical teaching of Jesus.
- ANSWER:**
- The requirement of personal repentance, faith in Jesus and obedience to Him**
- Everything about the Christian life is rooted and based on a personal relationship to Jesus, and that relationship begins when we put our trust or faith in Him.
- In His teaching, Jesus put very great emphasis on personal repentance from sin and faith in Himself.
- Repentance includes appreciating one's personal guilt before God,

confessing it to Him, and turning away from sin.

- Faith in Jesus includes receiving Him into one's life and trusting in Him for personal cleansing from sin.

- Jesus **commanded** people to put their faith in Him: ***“Trust in God, trust also in me.”*** (Jn 14:1 The first clause could be an affirmative.)

- Jesus **commanded** people to believe in Him, and on one occasion He explained that ***God requires this too.***

- In John chapter 6 we learn that after Jesus miraculously fed a great multitude they asked Him a question: ***“What must we do to do the work God requires?”***

- Their question amounted to: ***What does God most want us to do?”*** or ***“What can we do that will please God most?”***

- ***Jesus answer was, “The work of God is this, to believe in the one He has sent.”*** (Jn 6:28f)

- **In the light of the question Jesus was answering, His answer meant: *This is what God most wants you to do.***

Q: Just how important is this command to believe in Jesus?

A: John 3:18 says:

“Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.”

- Some people say this verse means that the only sin that God will hold against people is refusal to believe in His Son.

- But that surely is not what this verse means, or if it is, then we must choose between believing this verse and believing what the Bible says in hundreds of other places.

- For example, Romans 5:12 says, ***“Therefore just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.”***

- Death came and comes to people because of sin, not because of unbelief in Jesus.

- The people in Old Testament times about whom Paul was speaking had no Jesus to believe in, and yet death came to them.

- **Any sin is serious enough to bring God's condemnation upon us.**

- **But refusal to put our trust in Jesus makes that condemnation absolutely certain, *because faith in Jesus is the only way to avoid being condemned on the basis of our sins, our acts of disobedience to God.***

- In the same way we would say that a drowning man died because was in water over his depth, and he couldn't swim.

- But we could also say that he drowned because he refused to reach out and

take the life preserver that someone offered him.

- Believing in Jesus is like taking that life preserver; and refusing to believe in Him, like refusing a life preserver, is certain death, because we are all caught in the deep waters of sin.

- The proof that Jesus held this view is found in His words in **John 8:24**.

- At the time, He was involved in a controversy with the Pharisees who were insisting that His testimony about Himself was not valid (vs. 12).

- In verse 24 He said, **“I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins.”**

- **Faith in Jesus is the only thing that can separate us from the natural consequences of our sins.**

- We already stand condemned by a just and holy God, and unless Jesus provides cleansing and bears our guilt our judgement by God is certain..

- The most sincere study of the ethics of Jesus, and a life devoted to trying to obey His teaching is powerless to change that sad fact for the unbeliever.

- Jesus’ ethical teaching is authoritative and very important to us, but our hope for eternity does not rest upon our perfect obedience to it.

- **Personal faith in Jesus puts hope back into life.**

- **And so it makes the study and practice of His ethical teaching a matter of joyful obedience to our saviour and king, rather than a futile struggle to make ourselves acceptable to God.**

- When we are speaking about **repentance from sin and faith in Jesus** together, we sometimes refer to this pair of life-saving decisions as **the new birth**.

- This is what Jesus was talking about when He said to the Pharisee, Nicodemus, ***“You must be born again.”***

- We also refer to repentance and faith as **conversion**, because conversion includes the idea of turning away from sin and turning to Jesus in faith.

- We receive personal cleansing by Jesus and reconciliation with God when we are converted or born again.

- **Conversion** removes us from the condemnation and authority of the Law, and **brings us under the spiritual and ethical authority of Christ**.

- **So it marks the beginning of a new life characterized by obedience to Jesus.**

- **In other words, conversion is the individual’s introduction to Christian ethics.**

- An individual may learn a lot about Jesus and His teachings before conversion, but **true, heartfelt, personal submission to His ethical authority**

and teaching begins with conversion.

- The presence of a spirit submissive to Jesus is an evidence of true conversion or spiritual rebirth.
- The ethical teaching of Jesus is addressed to people who have been cleansed in God's sight.
- When they accept Jesus' cleansing on their behalf, their consciences testify that they have a clean slate.
- **The knowledge of personal cleansing as a result of God's cleansing, and the knowledge that we truly have a fresh start releases in Jesus' followers an ethical revolution.**
- Our desire to please Him is strengthened, our conscience testifies more loudly and clearly to the relevance of His revealed will.
- We begin to have a well-founded hope for the future and assurance of eventual victory in our ongoing personal struggles with temptation and sin.

Q: Have you any questions or comments about this basic element in Jesus' ethical teaching?