

Introduction to Christian Ethics
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Unit #7 Key Ethical Themes in the Teaching of Jesus
7I The Role of The Spirit

- In our last lesson, we studied Jesus' teaching on the subject of Evangelism.
- We saw that our duty to be involved in His work of building a people for Himself does not just flow from commands, but from our appreciation of How important His building project is to Him.
- Our consciences testify that we should do what is pleasing to Him, and we know that evangelism is very close to His heart.
- **The task of evangelizing all nations is far from completed, so we must claim it as ours.**
- **There is no better way of loving people than bringing them to Jesus.**

1. The Role of the Spirit

- We come now to The last theme in Jesus' ethical teaching that we will be examining in this introductory course.
- That theme is the role of the Holy Spirit in our ethical life.
- *The nature of the Holy Spirit, and His relationship to us were both explained for the first time in human history by Jesus.*
- *There are many Old Testament references to the Spirit, but they do not clearly reveal the reality of His personality and His wide-ranging and intimate involvement with people.*

- **First**, let's take a few minutes to review **the role of the Holy Spirit in the life and teaching of Jesus.**
- The angel who announced the birth of Jesus to Mary explained the miracle of His conception with the words, ***"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you."*** (Lk 1:35)
- The Spirit was the agent of the human incarnation of Jesus.
- John the Baptist explained the difference between his ministry and that of Jesus by saying (Mk 1:8), ***"I baptize you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."***
- John may have been thinking in terms of the Old Testament portrayal of the Spirit of God as God's power in action.
- The truth of John's remark was demonstrated by the Spirit's coming upon Jesus' disciples in power at Pentecost.

- But in the life and teaching of Jesus, the Spirit is revealed as ***much more than the Wielder of God's power.***
- On the occasion of Jesus' water baptism by John, Jesus seems also to have been baptized in the Spirit.
- This is how many understand John's vision of the heavens opening and the Spirit descending upon Jesus like a dove (Mk 1:10 cf. Acts 10:38f).
- Luke (4:1) confirms this interpretation by describing Jesus immediately after His baptism as ***"full of the Spirit."***
- This does not mean that the Spirit had no involvement in Jesus' life before His public baptism.
- What it means is that ***God wants us to know that what Jesus did during His ministry He did through the Holy Spirit.***
- This fullness of the Spirit demonstrated itself from the beginning of Jesus' public ministry to its conclusion at His ascension.
- Right after Jesus' endowment with the Holy Spirit, Mark says, ***"At once the Spirit sent Him out into the desert, and He was in the desert forty days being tempted by Satan."***
- From the moment of His baptism, Jesus was committed to a life of irreconcilable conflict with Satan.
- This conflict began immediately, ***at the instigation of the Spirit.***
- Two interesting things should be noted here:
 - ❖ when the Spirit manifests His presence in a person's life He leads; and
 - ❖ when He leads, He brings the individual into conflict with Satan.
- After Jesus' victory over Satan in the wilderness, He returned to Galilee ***in the power of the Spirit*** (Lk: 4: 14)
- There He gathered His first disciples, and began to teach and cast out demons (Mk 1:21ff).
- In these actions He demonstrated the power of the Spirit in His power over men, in His authoritative teaching, and in His power over demons.
- The Gospel writers do not continually point it out, but it is clear that all that Jesus said and did during His public ministry was done at the prompting of the Holy Spirit and in response to His leading.
- It is also clear from the fabric of Jesus' life, that when the Holy Spirit leads, the person led is committed to the work of God's kingdom.

- There is another feature of Jesus life and conduct under the influence of the Spirit that deserves special mention.
- I am referring to ***the spiritual intensity, focus, passion and zeal that characterized His words and His work.***
- These things run completely counter to the idea that Jesus was a meek and

mild man.

- During Jesus' ministry, many noticed His intensity and passion, and looked for ways to explain it.

- These traits of Jesus are mentioned fairly often in the Gospel records and they require explanation now as they did then.

- The psalmist foresaw this spiritual intensity in Ps 69:9, which says, "***Zeal for your house consumes me.***"

- It is recorded in **John 2:16f** that the disciples saw this passage as fulfilled when Jesus drove the money changers and sellers of animals out of the temple with a whip.

- This was certainly not the gentle Jesus, meek and mild.

- On one occasion Jesus was so preoccupied with His work that His disciples felt they had to urge Him to eat something (Jn 4:31).

- On that occasion He replied, "***My food, is to do the will of Him who sent me and to finish His work.***"

- His intense passion for His work made taking time for eating seem unimportant.

- Mark chapter 3 describes an occasion when Jesus was teaching a crowd and had no time to eat.

- In **verse 21** we are told that **members of His family** came to take Him into custody, **because they thought that He was out of His mind.**

- ***In other words, at that time His immediate family understood Jesus' passion and intensity as insanity.***

- **Mark 3:31** indicates that it was His mother and His brothers who had come to take custody of Him [**READ**].

- We cannot be sure whether Mary regarded Jesus' consuming passion for His work the way His brothers did.

- But we do know that during His ministry His brothers did not believe in Him (Jn 7:5), ***so it is not surprising that the things He was saying about himself led them to think thought He was out of His mind.***

- It is a credit to Mark's integrity as a historian that he included their uncomplimentary opinion in his account.

- On the same occasion, teachers of the Law who had come down from Jerusalem showed that they understood Jesus' passion and intensity in a very different way.

- They said, "***He is possessed by Beelzebub! By the prince of demons He is driving out demons.***"

- In other words, they saw His passion and intensity as evidence that He was demon possessed.

- Jesus' brothers seem to have been continually embarrassed by Him and His

ministry.

- On one occasion that is recorded in **John 7:2-5**, they asked Him to leave Galilee where the family lived and go away into Judea.

- They knew that Judea would be a dangerous place for Jesus because of His enemies there, and they may very well have hoped that His going would rid them of Him once and for all.

- Jesus replied to their callous words by saying that **His time had not yet come**.

- There seems to have been **a deliberate double meaning in these words**.

- **It wasn't His time to be popularly recognized, which is what His brothers pretended to be concerned about; and it wasn't His time to be killed, which is what they may actually have hoped would happen.**

- On another occasion, Jesus' Jewish hearers were divided in their assessment of Him.

- **John 10:20f** records their discord over Him:

Many of them said, "He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?" But others said, "These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"

- Jesus' passion and intensity forced His hearers to come to some opinion about Him.

- Some understood them as signs of demon possession or madness.

- But *the correct way to understand them is in the light of His indwelling and empowering by the Holy Spirit.*

- Paul demonstrated the same kind of preoccupation with God's work, and for this reason the Roman governor Festus shouted, ***"You are out of your mind, Paul! Your great learning is driving you insane."*** (Acts 26:24).

- This probably was not the only time Paul heard this charge directed at himself, for in 2 Corinthians 5:13f he replies to it as follows: ***"If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For Christ's love compels us, - - "***

- Part way through His ministry, Jesus sent out 70 disciples to teach and heal.

- When they returned to Jesus after a time of successful ministry we read that ***"Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit"*** (Mk 10:21, Mt 11:25).

- ***The close connection between the presence of the indwelling Spirit and joy is apparent here and in passages throughout the New Testament*** (e.g. **[READ] Acts 13:52; Ro 14:17; Gal 5:22; 1 Thess 1:6**)

- Jesus' joy was a consequence of the Spirit's active presence.

- His active presence has the same impact on us when we let Him lead.

- We come now to consider what Jesus said specifically about the Holy Spirit's involvement in the lives of His followers.

- Jesus explained the new birth (Jn 3) as an essential experience, because it is the only way anyone can experience <see> the Kingdom of God.

- He described the new birth as being *“born of the Spirit”*.

- This birth of the Spirit amounts to being born into God's family.

- It refers to a transforming experience that includes the beginning of a new spiritual life, and entry into a new relationship.

- This relationship carries with it all the blessings that belong to a child of God.

- In other words, *everything starts for us, spiritually speaking, when the Spirit accomplishes this transforming and life-giving work in us.*

- Jesus explained this mystery as involving believing in Him.

- **[READ Jn 7:37-39]**

- **This passage shows that the Spirit's coming would not have dramatic effects only on the occasion of our conversion or rebirth.**

- **The blessing would be ongoing and invigorating.**

- On another occasion, Jesus spoke of the future when His followers would face arrest and trial because of their association with Him.

- He said, *“do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say what is given to you at the time, for it is not you speaking but the Holy Spirit.”*

(Mk 13:11)

- In these words, Jesus is representing the Holy Spirit as a lawyer or advocate who speaks on a client's behalf at his trial.

- This instruction should be taken seriously by any believer who finds himself before a human court because of loyalty to Jesus.

- Of course, we have a good example of speech controlled by the Spirit on another type of occasion at Pentecost, when *“all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with in tongues as the Spirit enabled them”*

(Acts 2:4).

- Those speaking may not have understood exactly what they were saying, but as they spoke *their hearers heard and understood the voice of God.*

- The Greek word for an advocate who represents a client at his trial is *parakletos*, which has been brought into English as the word, *Paraclete*.

- The great importance of this name of the Holy Spirit is made clear in John's Gospel, where the wide range of the word's meaning, is illustrated by the things Jesus says about Him.

- The word refers to one who has been called along side to help [in a time of need], the way a lawyer is called alongside when a person has to face the

rigours of a trial.

- But the word, **Paraclete**, *can also refer to someone who is called alongside for other reasons.*

- **[READ John 14:15-18]**

- The promise Jesus makes here is clearly intended to be appreciated as a good thing.

- In this verse many translations prefer to use the word, **Helper**, instead of the translation, **Counsellor**.

- They do this because Jesus is **not** speaking about the Spirit's role as an **advocate**.

- He is speaking of the encouragement brought by His presence in us.

- As the Spirit of truth the **Paraclete** brings to our attention things that we need to appreciate.

- His role in us is not a visible or obvious one, so the world does not recognize it as a reality.

- Even believers often seem unaware of or insensitive to His presence, and if that is true of us, how much more true is it of people who have never experienced and recognized His inner workings in their spirits.

- That is one good reason why mention of the Holy Spirit is unlikely ever to form part of any secular university course on the ethics of Jesus.

- His presence in us is rightly understood as the presence of Jesus.

- **[READ John 14:25f]**

Q: Just how are we to understand this reminding and teaching role of the Spirit?

A: Some think that it removes from us any need or responsibility for personal effort to understand the Scriptures.

- *But it seems more sensible to think in terms of benefits that the Spirit adds to our own earnest efforts to understand God's Word.*

- We are intellectually lazy if we choose to regard the Holy Spirit as a shortcut to understanding, a shortcut that frees us of any responsibility to apply our minds to understanding the Scriptures.

- *The Spirit was sent to help us in areas where we need help, not to do for us what we are quite capable of doing for ourselves.*

- In this connection it is important to note that *even unbelievers who apply their minds to the study of the Scriptures are quite capable of understanding their intellectual content, and disagreeing with it.*

- They can do this through their own intellectual effort and without any special assistance from the Holy Spirit.

- We can do this too if we will make the required effort to develop our interpretive skills and benefit from the interpretive insights of others who

have studied the scriptures before us.

- Jesus' first disciples applied their minds to understanding Him while listening to His voice.
- We too can listen attentively to His voice while reading the Scriptures.
- But however we gain our acquaintance with Jesus' teachings, ***we need help precisely where unbelievers need help even when they have grasped the intellectual content of His words.***
- ***Like unbelievers, we need help in remembering specific scriptures at appropriate times in our lives.***
- Of course, He can only help us remember scriptures that we have first placed in our memories.
- ***We also need help with appreciating their application to us in specific life circumstances.***
- **The Spirit helps us in both of these areas: recollection and application.**
- He brings things to our remembrance when we need them; and He helps us to appreciate their personal implications or how they apply to us.
- In that sense, He brings the scriptures alive for us and shapes us by applying their message to our attitudes, feelings and actions.
- ***Unbelievers do not get this helpful reminder service, nor do they receive the gift of insight into the personal significance and application of the scriptures to them.***
- ***Appreciating what unbelievers do not receive helps us to recognize and appreciate what we, as believers, are blessed with.***
- In this passage Jesus makes the point here that the Helper that the Father sends will be sent ***in Jesus name***, or in other words ***as Jesus' alter ego or representative*** in our lives.
- **One obvious and very important implication of this is that the Spirit represents the ethical authority of Jesus in our lives.**
- **His convicting work in us does not end when we repent and believe.**
- The Christian's conscience does not do its important work alone.
- In bringing Jesus' words to our minds, ***the Spirit works with and through our conscience.***
- Whenever children of God are in the near vicinity of sin, or actually in its grasp, He is there reminding us of the right path.
- He reminds us of our Lord's wishes and commands when we need such a reminder.
- Supposedly, He does this to help us remain unsoiled by sin.
- He is also concerned to keep us usable for the work of the Kingdom.
- He points out to us occasions when our thoughts, our actions or our intentions are unacceptable.

- **[READ John 15:26f]**

- Here Jesus points out that our Helper is the Spirit of truth.

Q: How do you understand the meaning of this title, Spirit of truth?

A: [DISCUSS]

- It does mean that He comes to us as a philosopher, a scholar or an intellect enhancer.

- Rather He speaks about Jesus, the one who is the Truth with a capital “T”.

- He testifies about the One who said, “*I am the truth.*”.

- *He gives us insights about the Jesus we have come to know*, reminding us of what it is that we know and what that knowledge implies and requires of us by way of response.

- *Note that the testifying role of the Spirit is linked to our testifying role.*

- What He reminds us about, concerning Jesus, we must also testify about, telling others.

- We may not have walked the dusty roads of Galilee with Jesus, but we have seen and heard the living Word through the written Word, so we must tell others what He has said and done.

- **[READ John 16:5-15]**

- There is a lot in this portion, and we can only consider a few of its highlights.

- The Spirit will help the world to appreciate the truth about the standard of righteousness displayed in Jesus, and about the grim reality of God’s attitude toward sin as demonstrated at the cross.

- *The Spirit blesses unbelievers with these insights.*

- That is how unbelievers are enabled to cross over into the family of faith.

- *As a witness, the Spirit does not ask us to pay attention to Himself.*

- Instead, He speaks about Jesus and what belongs to Jesus, bringing glory to Jesus.

- There are some who make a habit of speaking at great length about the Spirit of God.

- Some even encourage praying to the Holy Spirit, although the Scriptures say nothing about this either by way of command or example.

- In fact, there is as much Biblical authority for praying to Mary or Joseph as there is for praying to the Holy Spirit.

- *Instead of drawing attention to Himself, the Spirit makes a habit of speaking about Jesus, of bringing our attention back to Him and helping us to appreciate His glory.*

- *He does not give us new information about Jesus, but points us back to*

the truth about Jesus as we have come to know it.

- Even when the Spirit reveals the future, as He does in the Apocalypse of John, He continues to keep our attention focused on Jesus, rather than Himself.

- That is why the last book of the Bible is titled, “*the Revelation of Jesus Christ.*”

- When Jesus spoke of the empowering of the Spirit, *it was empowering for the work of witnessing to the world about Him.*

- In Acts 18 Jesus says to His disciples, “*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*”

- The Spirit’s empowering is for the work of witnessing.

- The *specific mention made of Samaria* here was a clear way of telling the disciples that their witnessing was not to be limited to Jewish people.

- *Samaritans were utterly unacceptable to most Jewish people for friendship, fellowship or any social interaction.*

- *But Jesus specifically indicated that He wanted them to hear about Him and be welcomed into His Church, His people.*

- We have now surveyed what the Scriptures say about the Holy Spirit’s role in Jesus’ life and ministry, and what Jesus said about the role of the Spirit in the lives of His followers.

- *Now let’s sum up what we have found.*

- The Spirit brings non-believers to *personal conviction, repentance and faith in Jesus.*

- He accomplishes the transforming miracle of *the new birth* in us, with the result that we become *spiritually alive, and ethically awake.*

- At long last, we have become *willing to obey our Lord and motivated to please Him.*

- *He reminds us of the things we have learned and understood about Jesus when we need to remember them, and helps us to appreciate their significance and application to us.*

- *The Spirit’s presence in us can best be described as inconspicuous.*

- His work in us *continues where Jesus left off.*

- His activity in us is *characterized by hints, nudges, insights, promptings and reminders.*

- *As Jesus’ alter ego or other self, the Spirit teaches us by pointing us to the words and example of Jesus.*

- *The best test of whether our thoughts are being led by the Holy Spirit is whether they focus our thinking on Jesus.*

- *The Spirit works with our consciences* to remind us of the things that we should and should not do, because we belong to Jesus.
- *His ethical guidance is not independent in nature; it is subordinate to the teachings of Jesus.*
- For us, as for Jesus, being led by the Spirit means coming into conflict with Satan and resisting his influence in our lives.
- It also means being helped to understand and appreciate the truth that we have come to know.
- *Jesus did not do a lot of commanding or yelling at people.*
- Isaiah predicted in 42:2, *“He will not shout or cry out, or raise His voice in the streets.”*
- Instead of yelling and shouting, Jesus helped people to understand God’s ways for themselves.
- *The Spirit has a similar role*; He leads us to ponder what we have come to know, and encourages us to act on it.
- *Often the Spirit’s prompting consists of helping us to recognize how the love principle should be followed and applied in our lives.*
- I get really uncomfortable when people frequently use the expression, *“I felt led to,”* because my impression is that what they often mean is, *“I felt inclined to,”* and **there is an important distinction between personal inclination and the Spirit’s leading.**
- Personal inclinations generally flow from our own opinions, preferences, likes and dislikes.
- *But the inner urge to respond to the needs of others as we become aware of them is undoubtedly His work in us, and we should not resist His gentle promptings in this direction.*
- His guidance in our lives and His illumination of our understanding are not theoretical things but *practical help in personal godliness and service.*
- *Although His soft voice is the voice of Jesus, it is easily ignored.*
- Without an effort to listen, we may fail to hear Him.
- *But when we are attentive and respond to Him obediently, He leads us into obedience to our Lord.*
- *When we are obedient, He takes our obedience to the next level.*
- *He empowers it, making it useful and fruitful for God.*
- For us, as for Jesus, being led by the Spirit means being concerned about the growth of the kingdom of God, and personally involved in its building.
- *When we let Him lead us, we develop the kind of spiritual zeal, intensity and focus that were visible in Jesus, and evident in Paul.*
- Spirit-led people are passionate about serving their Lord.
- For this reason they may be seen by unbelievers as fanatics.

- This is understandable, because *they are gripped by loves and concerns that unsaved people cannot understand or appreciate.*
- For us, as for Jesus, *being indwelled by the Spirit also means that we experience joy in God's service.*
- We experience this joy when we see God's purposes being accomplished, when we see His kingdom growing, and especially *when we recognize that He is working through us.*

- **Have you any questions or thoughts to share about the Spirit's practical and ethical ministry in our lives?**