

Is It Ethical?

Franklin Church of Christ
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AM Worship

Introduction:

I want to begin by playing a word association game. I am going to say a list of words and then you let me know what it made you think of. Enron, Worldcom and Martha Stewart. When you hear these names do you think of deceit, fraud, misappropriation of funds, lying, stealing, cheating? You probably thought of all those things and worse. Over the past five years business ethics has become a major topic of discussion in the corporate world. Sadly, however, the church has not been immune to these ethical tragedies. Having heard the stories of Christians in various places and their falls from the ethical high ground, I believe we need to give thought to ethics ourselves. We are Christians. What are God's standards for ethics? Examine six Bible standards to determine if something is ethical.

Discussion:

I. The Bottom Line Rule

- A. This rule clearly governs every other rule we will discuss today. It is found in **Matthew 6:33**, "But seek first His kingdom and righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." Is what you are doing godly? Would you do it if Jesus were standing there with you, watching you? After all, He is standing there with you watching you.
- B. Too many have a different bottom line rule. Their bottom line rule is about money, power, prestige or personal reputation. They do not think about whether what they are doing is right or wrong. They will do whatever it takes to make a buck, get ahead or stay on top. That is not our standard. Our standard is whether or not what we are doing is righteous by God's standards. As **I Peter 1:15-16** says, we must be holy as God is holy in all of our dealings. When God's kingdom and righteousness governs us and motivates our actions, then it is ethical.

II. The Golden Rule

- A. **Matthew 7:12** says, "In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you." How do you want people to treat you? With kindness, respect, integrity, honesty. Then you must treat them that way. Do you want others to give you their best? You must give them your best. Do you want others to be consistent and sincere? You must be consistent and sincere.
- B. Perhaps the greatest obstacle to keeping this Golden Rule is our attitude toward other people. We are just too important to spend our time worrying about what is good for everyone else. Once we have our bases covered, then we will think about what others need. However, **Philippians 2:3** says we must view others as more important than ourselves. When our action is based on doing best for others, then it is ethical.

III. The Honesty Rule

- A. When we think of Enron, Worldcom and Martha Stewart, we think of people and organizations that lack integrity. Why? Because they lied and cheated. If we are going to follow Christ's ethics we must be honest. In fact, absolute honesty is one thing that sets us apart from the world. In **Ephesians 4:25**, Paul said Christians are to speak the truth in love.
- B. **Matthew 5:33-37** demonstrates the honesty we must have. Many develop intricate rules for honesty (consider the Pharisees in **Matthew 23:16-22**). Our rule is simple. Are you speaking? Tell the truth. As the NKJV translates, our yes should be yes and our no should be no.
- C. There is a secondary aspect to the honesty rule. What we say about what we are going to do must also be the truth. When we make a commitment with our mouths we must keep it. In the business world, people claim verbal agreements are not worth the paper they are written on. As Christians, our word is to be our bond. If we commit, we follow through. As **Psalms 15:4** says, even if it hurts, we follow through and do not change. If it is honest, then it is ethical.

IV. The Extra Mile Rule

- A. The extra mile rule is highlighted in **Matthew 5:45**. The issue behind this statement was that the Jews were a slave nation to the Romans. As such, if a Roman soldier or governing official commandeered a Jew to carry a burden, the Jew had to comply. Jesus said, if they say carry it one mile, take it two. Go the extra mile. That rule should govern how we work in every situation.

B. **Ecclesiastes 9:10** says, “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.” There is no room in the Christian ethic for half-hearted attempts and half-done jobs. We are not given room to cut corners. We must do the best we can do at all times. Though Paul was talking to slaves in **Ephesians 6:5-8**, we should all work by the same principles, as though the Lord was our boss. When we are going the extra mile, as though working for the Lord, then it is ethical.

V. The Time Management Rule

A. In **Ephesians 5:15-16**, Paul pointed out that we need to make the most of our time because the days are evil. Paul is making an allusion to **Ecclesiastes 9:12**. The days are evil, that is, we never know what a day may bring forth. It may bring forth our unexpected death. Since that is the case, we need to use each day to its fullest potential, making the most of each one.

B. This principle applies to all of our relationships, whether work, school, family, church, neighbor or any other relationship we need to redeem the time. However, this principle is probably most appropriate in our work relationships. When we are on the clock, we are to work. Our bosses are not paying us to play computer solitaire, daydream or add five minutes to our coffee breaks. If we are going to work with integrity we have to make the most of our time. Some will say, “I am managing my time in accordance with what they are paying me.” Let me remind you of the extra mile rule. Go the extra mile in your time management. Make the most of your time for your boss, your clients, your spouse, your children. When you are redeeming the time, it is ethical.

VI. The Consistency Rule

A. Most people view being ethical with a sliding scale. That is, they view ethics as one of those interview questions that asks, “On a scale of 1 to 5, rank how ethical you are. 5 means always ethical, 4 means ethical most of the time, 3 means ethical about half of the time, 2 means seldom ethical and 1 means never ethical.” Christian ethics do not work that way. We are either ethical or we are not. We do not get to say we are ethical because we are ethical at home and at church. If we are not ethical on the job, instead of being ethical we are being hypocritical.

B. According to **James 3:17**, the wisdom that is from above is without hypocrisy. That means it is the same at all times. It does not say one thing and do another. It does not judge the situation and claim that since this is business we can behave differently. I remember once in Texas meeting with a brother who was leaving the Lord with a couple of the elders. The brother started using foul language. One of the elders immediately called him on the carpet for it. His response was, “Come on, it’s just us guys here.” What was happening there? His real ethical standards were coming through.

C. I am not saying we never make mistakes and never sin. I am simply saying that if we are trying to live by one set of standards at church, one set at home, one set at work and one set when we are with the guys, we are fooling ourselves. Consider the Pharisees of **Matthew 23:14**. They tried to live by multiple standards. I can almost hear one of those Pharisees now being called on the carpet for devouring a widow’s house, “Come on, this is only business. A guy has to make a living you know.” All the rules we have talked about must be followed in every walk of life. Only then can God be glorified, which is really what ethics is all about according to **Matthew 5:16**. When we are being consistently ethical, then it is ethical.

Conclusion:

Perhaps some of the greatest examples of ethics were those who had oversight of the house of the Lord and the workmen who repaired the house of the Lord in the time of king Josiah. In **II Kings 22:3-7**, the king commissioned that the temple be repaired. In that he claimed that the overseers and workers did not have to provide an accounting, because they dealt faithfully. What a great statement. That is how we need to be. That is living ethically.