

Christian Apologetics
“*always be prepared to give a defense...*”

XI. Moral and Ethical Decisions and Conclusion

What are ethics and morals?

The terms *ethics* and *morals* are commonly used interchangeably. Ethics can be defined as a set of principles of right conduct or moral values; a fixed set of moral laws by which one can measure human behavior. In other words, ethics can be thought of as the standards (laws, prescriptions) that individuals are “obligated” to obey.

Ethics explains why you believe something is right or wrong. Ethical standards are the reasons we give for judging one action good and another action bad. These standards are the ultimate reasons we give in answer to the question "Why *should* you do this?"

This does not mean that by knowing about ethics, you will make proper moral choices. All it means is that you will be better able to explain why you make the choices you do. (*Exodus 20; Matthew 6,5,7; Romans, James...*)

Moral Absolutism - Right is right and wrong is wrong. Actions are inherently good or bad, regardless of the consequences.

Moral absolutism claims that there are eternal moral values and eternal moral principles that are applicable everywhere. This is the popular position of those who believe in a Deity who establishes moral order in the universe.

Ethical Relativism - Circumstances alter cases. Everyday standards are good, but exceptions are also right and good. The judgment of good or bad is based upon the result or consequence of the act rather than the act itself. An action is right if it tends to produce the greatest good for the greatest number.

Ethical relativism claims that when two individuals, groups or cultures disagree on their moral views of an act, both can be right.

The ultimate difference is between “*what is*” [the way humans behave] and “*what ought to be*” [a standard]. Without an overriding “*ought to be*”, moral actions are no longer a matter of ethics [a standard against which to be measured]; they become a matter of “socially acceptable” behavior.

Considerations:

- Behaviors and decisions must have a basis for acting or believing a certain way.
- Humans have this curious idea that they ought to behave a certain way and cannot really get rid of it. Secondly, that they do not in fact behave that way. *C.S. Lewis*
- The fact that all humans consider certain behaviors “good” or “bad” indicates a higher standard by which those behaviors are measured or judged.
- Ethical or moral decisions are not a matter of instinct – If you pass by someone who is drowning, two instincts kick in – the herd instinct (save the person) and the self-preservation instinct (don’t

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try and save the person, it is too risky). Something has to mediate between the two “instincts” so that the right [moral] act is performed. *Geisler*

Series Conclusion

I Peter 3:15 tells us that we must “*be ready to give an apologia (answer, defense) to anyone who asks us for a reason for the hope that is in us*” – i.e. why we believe what we believe. People are looking for something to believe in.

The Christian not only has something to believe in, but has a hope built in to it. A hope in a Creator/Maker, a hope in a Savior, a hope in a firm salvation, and a hope in an eternal future.

We will be asked why we believe what we believe from a number of different angles depending upon the perspective of those asking. Look for that perspective, find the common ground. Answer questions with questions to clarify. And above all remember the goal is to present the Truth, not win the argument.

