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Re: It's getting deep in here!

by [Steven Reece](#) - Friday, October 5, 2012, 10:58 AM

Wendy, you have asked some good questions. I believe that we can lead ethical lives without having a relationship with Christ.

Since humankind has been created in the image of God, I reason that God is the source of ethical behavior. We therefore have the capacity to be loving, generous, gracious, creative, etc. but we also have the capacity to lie, cheat, murder and steal. This is a paradox; nevertheless, God has placed within his creation a sense of right and wrong. As you noted previously, we can corrupt our conscience through various behaviors and practices.

I have known and worked with many people who are not followers of Christ. Many of them have been good, moral and decent people, who lived highly ethical lives and in my observation did the right thing consistently. On the other hand, I have also known Christians, who were unethical, rude, and hateful people; they frequently did the right thing for the wrong reasons.

I believe the underlying factor that I am trying to get at is motivation. Do I do the right thing because it is the right thing to do? Or, do I do the right thing to please someone or to gain something from somebody else?

I believe that the power of what the "Good Samaritan" did was that he did the right thing, expecting nothing in return. What he did was astonishing because, he was seen by his audience as an outcast who did not live properly accordingly their standard. Jesus used this parable to emphasize the point that righteous (or ethical -- doing the right thing) behavior is not a matter of religious identity. Mercy is a matter of the heart. Compassion flows from God. What flows from our heart? Does what we do reflect God's character, his ethic?

The primary issue at hand is not salvation because it cannot be earned by our own effort. We are discussion ethical living and clearly, we can see right actions among those who do not know God.

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Re: God made ethics simple!

by [Steven Reece](#) - Thursday, October 4, 2012, 08:33 AM

Wendy, your concluding statement and questions, led me in another direction. If God gives us a conscience, is it not given in order to give us a sense of right and wrong? As you well stated, "it can be heightened, diminished, or otherwise altered by our experience and environment" and clearly we can turn and go our own way. I think that you last question is powerful: what motivates people to live ethical lives?

Your question leads me to consider the parable of the Good Samaritan.

In this story the religious lawyer asks Jesus, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus asks him something like this, "What does the Law say? How do you read it?" In his response the man says basically that we are to love God and neighbor. Then the lawyer seeks to justify himself by asking, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus tells the story of the man who was beaten and left for dead. In the story we see that an outcast -- a Samaritan, who does not have "the Law" to guide him, be merciful while the two "self-righteous men," who know what the Law requires, avoid the man in need.

I believe that this story is given to us as an illustration of God writing "his law on our hearts" as way to show his goodness, his character or even his ethic that is expressed not by following an external set of ethics -- by what self-righteous people can do but by something else, something that is internally driven. How does someone show such mercy? Such compassion for a stranger? This is the mystery that confronts us when we realize that we really cannot produce the goodness that we truly desire by our own actions. The answer is found in Christ who brings about a new birth a spiritual transformation in us through trusting him.

I must ask myself these questions: Am I living a transformed life? Am I gracious and merciful to others?