

ethics.doc

Last week Mark talked about the indicative--what Xt's already done. Tonight we're going to look at the **imperative--the things we should do in response to God's work.** In other words, Xtian **ethics--morality--**the difference between right and wrong.

Some people mistakenly think the the heart of Xtianity is just that--a system of rules. If you turned to our passage and read without taking it in context of what preceded it, you might come to that same false conclusion.

When we start reading in vs 13 of chpt 1., it's essential to consider one important word: **"Therefore."** This word implies that there's a foundation for what follows. Without one, we're not qualified to discuss Xtian ethics.

The **foundation** is that we (as Xtians) were spiritually reborn, starting our lives anew in the spirit, living under and understanding the grace of God. The reason this foundation is crucial, is that unless we know God in a personal way, why should we follow the morality of God in the Bible?

**Without the Holy Spirit** living inside you, you don't have the ability to do so even if you thought His morality was a good idea. A lot of people think, "Why not obey God, His morality seems as good as the next

religious system." Others were raised in a church and while they don't believe what God's values stand for, they're comfortable continuing their parents' Xtian traditions.

For those of us who do have a **personal relat.** with Xt, we've been renewed by God's Spirit, and therefore have both the basis and the ability to do what the Bible calls on us to do. Our basis is Xt's love for us. This is why Peter focused so much on all Xt's done for us (great inheritance, eternal life, HS renewing, gift of forgive.)

**God's love so affects us** that to some degree, we begin to express that love to others. To teach us how to love, we are given a list of dos and don'ts, of ethics, that taken together are called Xtian love and show what Xtians should do. According to the NT, the summation of Xtian ethics is to love our brothers like Xt loved us.

Before we go on, there is one **roadblock** to Xtians having the ability to love Xt's way. If you're a Xtian but don't understand grace, you're a **legalist**. You think it's up to you, in your own strength to follow God's rules.

That's impossible because **God is absolutely moral**. When God writes down morality, it's not in a relative sense but absolute. He doesn't say, "Don't tell lies unless it's really important," or "At least tell the truth most of the time."

God says, "Tell the truth in all cases. Never deceive or lie." A legalist thinks, "Ahhh. All the time? Isn't that a bit extreme? That's asking a lot." You get further under the pile because since you don't understand grace, you feel you don't have the freedom to fail under God's moral system.

Instead, you **reinterpret** what God asks you to do so it lines up more closely with your experiences and abilities--a game of mental gymnastics with the Word.

This is **nothing new: the Pharisees** did this in Xt's day. When Xt told them to love their neighbor, they asked, "But who's my neighbor?" Come on. Duh. I wonder who?!! This wasn't a genuine theological question. This man was a legalist, and the passage in Lk 10 says the man "was seeking to justify himself." It's obvious who your neighbor is.

When you're **under grace, you can freely admit**, "I don't always do the right thing. I fall way short." You have the ability to do this because you understand that you're completely forgiven and have unconditional acceptance and love of Xt.

So we can study Xtian ethics because of our ability to admit our failures. If we're under grace, we have the ability to succeed. The grace of God enables us to do what we can't in and of ourselves.

That's the **difference between law and grace**: We do what's right because we've been accepted by the Lord, not in order to be accepted by God. We do what's right through the power of the HS not in our own strength. First, Xt tells us what to do, then He empowers us to do it.

(Q: The why do we still try to do so much in our own strength?)

**Peter repeatedly goes back and focuses on grace.** He knows we'd rather focus on law and ourselves because we're so prideful. He draws our reluctant attention off ourselves and onto Xt, away from law and onto grace.

Every time he tells us what to do, he also tells us to remember what Xt has done for us. This is the key to Peter's unique writing style. He alternates back and forth between the indicative or what Xt has already done for us and the imperative, what our response ought to be.

When he says in vs 13, "Gird your minds for action, be sober in spirit," this means we're to be action-oriented, alert. By focusing our mind and reminding ourselves what the real spiritual issues are, including our eternal destiny, we spiritually arm ourselves.

The **believer who's informed, who's reflected** on the Truth of God's word and is convinced in that position,

becomes galvanized. He knows who he is and where he's going. He's "girded his mind for action."

Illus: Swimmer on the starting block. Every muscle is tensed and ready for action, waiting for the gun.

How **different this image is from today's Xtian** who awaits Xt's return in a self-centered slumber. They might say they're into God, but really it's the god within! They're into self.

READ vs 15: "As obedient children, do not be conformed lusts...that were yours in ignorance, but be yourselves holy...in behavior..."

We bristle hearing the word, "holy," because we have a **warped understanding of holiness**. That it conjures up images of the holy may in the movie, "Dances With Wolves." Probably 90% couldn't define it at all, or would say holiness is some ethereal goodness reserved for the spiritual elite.

It really **means different, distinct, special**, and applies to all Xtians.

Inherent in the concept of holiness is that something is **wrong with the world**. As we look at the world today, the Bible's position is that it's not as God intended, not as it should be. Therefore, it's desirable that Believers are different, special. Not to be distinct, is to say we're a mess too.

Read vs 15.. "Do not be conformed to your former lusts,,evil desires that were your in ignorance."

What are these evil desires? Just our selfish wants. The Bible teaches that man's into selfishness and exploiting people. Man does not naturally seek to edify or build up someone else. He will cheat, lie and even kill to gratify himself.

Illus.--Nydra Ross case--A perfect ex. of this drive for self-gratification is the Nydra Ross case my dad is the judge for. Dale Penton is ~~accused of~~ <sup>found guilty of</sup> trying to force a ~~14~~<sup>9</sup>-yr-old girl to perform ~~sex~~ sex. When she refused, he murdered her and dumped her body in a river.

The self-centeredness of man also leads to profound **loneliness**. We all sense this from time to time. Even us **good Xtians struggle** daily with self-centeredness. To give in to this reaps discontent. We have a need, an inner craving for something more.

The world teaches us to **anesthetize** this inner need, not to heal it, because the world has no cure. The only alternative is to numb the inner longing through drugs, working out, materialism or through a sexual encounter. The result is isolation not fulfillment.

**Don't think Xtians are immune from numbing** themselves from seeing and meeting other people's needs. We can alienate ourselves through romantic relationships,

motions of doing Xtian work.

Read vs 18 "knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver and gold, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the precious blood of Xt...futile way of life inherited from forefathers.."

Our forefathers had their own idols, they were just different from the ones we have today. We tend to map a plan out for our lives clear through retirement. A span of 80 years can go the way of existentialism in total futility and missing any lasting purpose or impact.

**Most people plan only to look out for their best** interests. This is selfishness at its worst. It's immoral. Xt wants to redeem us from a futile life; to give us purpose and meaning. Xt's way is for believers to look away from self toward meeting the needs of others.

**Our action is to win the minds and hearts** of people who don't know Xt personally. To accomplish this, we must keep sober and alert in the struggle against tangible spiritual enemies-Satan and his minions.

Our eyes must be **focused on Xt's grace** or else we'll lose heart and slide back into self-centredness. To pull ourselves up out of lethargy, we have to look to the future, to the grace to be revealed.

impartially judges according to each man's works...conduct yourselves in fear..." Our God is a great God. The day will come when people will be dumb struck as He passes judgment. If we acknowledge this event, there's no way to deny the ultimate importance of our daily lives either.

The word 'fear' in this vs doesn't mean to be afraid or fearful. It's an idiom that means to have a sense of awe, respect, sobriety. This is carried into our lives as we sense a tension between the vital spiritual issues and our day-to-day existence. This is also the implication in the verse cautioning us to "gird our minds for action, to be sober in spirit."

We should cultivate an attitude of "What if I miss the moment? What if I'm asleep at the wheel when some important spiritual event takes place?" What we should be afraid of is: to live one day in spiritual oblivion, serving our own interests and not caring about or paying attention to the needs and the battle for souls around us.

Peter says we should conduct ourselves so that the Truth dictates a serious outlook in our lives. Not that we can't enjoy life, but that we assess what's important from a Biblical standpoint instead of getting caught up in the lies of the world.

spiritually lost. We should look for opportunities to share Xt through our actions and with our words.

Peter also says to **remember that Xt came to redeem** you and your friends from a tragic world and problematic lives. Remember what that cost Xt.

God sent Xt, His only Son to die when it should have been you on that cross. He took upon Himself the condemning judgment that should have been yours. Consider the importance God attaches to you--He would have died the same way even if you were the only person in the world.

Read vs 23--this calls for a radical alteration in you life--the humility to accept God's free gift and acknowledge that you don't deserve and can't earn it. God's against human pride; that's one reason He demands we accept His handout.

Read vs 22. "Since you have in obedience to the Truth purified you souls for the sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart."

**Philadelphia love** is the natural response but a unique love and warmth for Xtians. We feel a need, an affinity to be with other believers. This kind of love is the root of Xtian fellowship.

further, to **agapao**, or **sacrificially love and serve** others.

It's possible to be a Xtian and be drawn to other **believers without ever lifting a finger to serve** them.

Ex. of evangelical Xtians willing to sit in their pews but never get out and help--from Jane Briscoe's tape. Also happens in our **fellowship**, in our h.c. We should initiate, not wait around to be asked to serve.

1 Jn. 3:16--"Xt laid down His life...we ought to."

:18--"Not love in word but deed and truth."

This is **what Xtian love is really about**. These rules in 1 Peter are synonymous to Xtian love. "Be ye holy" really means to fervently love one another from the heart. And this is no different from "girding our minds for action." When Peter challenges us to "conduct ourselves...", again he's really calling on us to fervently love each other.

The entire **passage is really discussing the same thing**: We're have a reason and are able to love one another because Xt first loved us and now the HS lives within us if we're Xtians. If we truly understand and believe this, we will be compelled to exert ourselves and try to find practical ways to serve others.

**Agape love is an act of the will**. You decide whether or not to love and serve your brother or sister in Xt. To

from God.

Girding our minds for action. Keeping sober in spirit. Fixing our hope on Xt. Sound desirable but **difficult?** Last week, Bill Gross asked how we could "do the right thing."

**Peter keeps reminding** his contemporaries to do these things and others until he must have sounded like a broken record. But he didn't care what they thought about his nagging because he knew the issues were critical.

The same is **true for us today.** Practicing these things breeds doing the right thing, the moral and Godly thing.

Illus.--altitude chamber. In Cleveland on assignment, learned about pilots' problems when suffer from oxygen loss. When **inexperienced pilots** were asked to put on their oxygen masks, act as though didn't hear the request and just sat there twiddling their thumbs.

But when **trained pilots** were asked to put on their masks, they didn't have any greater capacity to coordinate their minds with their motor skills, yet because of their experience, they automatically responded by putting their masks over their mouths.

The point of this analogy: is that we as Xtians can **train ourselves** to do the right thing. We should