

is a carefully stated title for our course. The title is not "The Bible Teaches Morality." Hohum, everybody knows that!

"Does the Bible Teach Morality?" would be less boring: devotion is the main thing the Bible teaches, *Whom* we are to devote our all to; but it teaches also *how* we are to go about this devotion (Latin root, "vow"), dedication (Latin root, "proclamation" of intention), this consecration (Latin root, separating ourselves to this "sacred" task), this hallowing (Anglo-Saxon root, "concentrating" our "entire" attention on [eg, God's name, as in the Lord's Prayer], to the exclusion of all other possible objects of devotion [thus other gods being idols]). Sounds strenuous, doesn't it? It is. It's **principled behavior**, which is a definition of morality (as immorality is unprincipled behavior). So we've already arrived at a fact many would find surprising: the Bible only **indirectly** teaches morality (eg, the Ten Commandments, as you can see in the First Commandment, only indirectly teaches morality). I must emphasize: This course is about something the Bible teaches only indirectly, implicitly. So it turns out that the title, "The Bible Teaches Morality," would be wrong (suggesting that that's what the Bible sets out to teach) or at least misleading. The title I've crafted runs some danger of misunderstanding, but it diminishes that danger by reducing "morality" (which in the other two options is a known) to an unknown, something to be discovered: the course is an adventure in discovery.

1 The blurb advertising the course gives the situation & the hope: "Moral confusions and evasions trouble both private and public life in our country and the world today. Less as a lawbook than a light, the Bible can help in and out of this darkness. Bring your Bible and your biases (opinions and convictions)."

2 What can be well done in this course in which we are together only 6 hours, 4 1½-hour sessions? If our hearts (our inner lives) are open, eager, and honest, what can't be done? For my part, I promise (1) to speak as simply as the subject allows & I can, (2) to encourage you to think & speak to me & the others, (3) to listen to you as well as I can, & (4) to help you make such prayerful amendments of your thought & life as seem to you appropriate & thus God's will.

3 This is a course in *thinking about doing* something. The doing is called **morality**, the thinking is called **ethics**. The distinction sounds simple, but observing it is tough. We can go wrong in a number of ways. Eg, we falsely relate the two if we think one more important than the other--imagining that just doing what you should is OK without thinking about it (which is robotic behavior, beneath the powers of dolphins, chimps, & humans), or the reverse, ie, thinking about it is the Real Thing, so what you do is so relatively unimportant that you are free to behave as you please, as it pleases you (which is antinomianism, unprincipled behavior, which [we saw above] defines "immorality").

What then? The ideal is thoughtful behavior, what Socrates called "the examined life," the cycle of **action** (behavior, morality), **reflection** (thinking, ethics, critically examining the action, & the self-in-action [self-examination]), with a view to improvement in the next **action**--an unending turning of the wheel. Awareness is one way to look at it: being God-aware, world-aware, consequences-aware, self-aware. Awakeness is another way to put it, the Buddhist way. "Pray without ceasing" is a biblical way to put it.

4 As the cycle or wheel turns, it's going somewhere. You determine that somewhere. You're always up to something. That something is your **goal**, even if it's only to goof off. Behind that goal is your **motivation**, that complex engine of motives (Latin, what "moves" you), incentives, drives, sanctions. Your motivational rubber hits the road in the form of **intentions**, general purposes & concrete plans, how to get from here to there. But where's here? You define your situation as within the Big Picture. What's that? Your **vision** of how things should be. Eg, "Our Father.....Thy kingdom come...." Your vision is your there when you're thinking about how to get from here to there.

Yes, the terms are not watertight. Planners speak of goals & of **objectives** for reaching them, or vice versa. Note too how goal & vision overlap: both are futuristic, looking to fulfilment--the goal as proximate (partial, & relatively near), the vision as ultimate (complete, & relatively far, & more something done to us than something we do, though our whole doing is caught up in it if our living is truly intentional).

5 Take President Woodrow Wilson's vision, eg. Yesterday I heard Boris Yeltsin say to the U.S. Congress, "History is giving us a chance to fulfil President Wilson's vision, to 'make the world safe for democracy'." (He's ex-communist, but you'll remember that "history" is the Communist surrogate for "God." His last words, however, referred to deity: "Irving Berlin, an American of Russian [Jewish] descent," gave you a song. I say to you now, in closing, "God bless America"--& Russia." And he used the biblical term "idol" as an implicit enemy of God: "The idol of communism has collapsed, never to rise again.") On any one day in the history of the world, somebody makes the greatest speech, & it's seldom known who. Yesterday, it must have been Yeltsin.

6 What's the Bible's most quoted saying? "God is love"? Maybe. Maybe also this: "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Pr.29.18 KJV; NRSV, "...prophecy, the people cast off restraint": the people need speakers of God's will, else they run amok--for these speakers ever renew the vision. LXX here has guide, interpreter, "exegete" (transliteration of ἐξηγητής); Vulg., "prophetia."

However the vision comes--in the Bible, it's by revelation, divine unveiling --it's essential to the domestic (government & family) tranquility & prosperity. The current parlance would call it a "value," a word much heard even before Veep Quayle sniffed at Murphy Brown's bastard as violating "moral values" & "family values" (& the White House press secretary agreed, but then praised M.B. for not having gotten an abortion & thus having honored one "family value!"). Inevitably, the press applies critical consciousness to any expression that becomes code: the 6 Jun 92 NEWSWEEK cover blared "Whose values?"....Note that when "value(s)" is used elatively (with high connotations), it overlaps with "vision." Our country is suffering from the absence of a motivating vision, & the presidential aspirants are struggling to provide it. In the absence of a uniting vision, "values" talk may serve political-divisive purposes but cannot lift morals.

7 Vision is **indispensable** not only for health of spirit-mind-body but also even for survival. It's a gift of God by nature & grace. The gospel tells us how it's a gift of grace. Consider how it's a gift of God in-through nature:

(1) Orthodox Darwinism teaches that cells (socalled, by the way, as a metaphor from monastery cells, which they put Robt. Hooke in mind of in 1665) randomly hit upon adaptation mutations), but this year it's become clear that bacteria direct their own changes. On a brick walk in Herbert Hoover's hometown, I saw the warning sign "PERSONS AT WORK." Soon I came upon women replacing broken bricks. (Shocking, after all your life you've seen "MEN WORKING.") Well, in biology, the sign "RANDOMNESS AT WORK" has to be scrapped & replaced by "MIND AT WORK." Mind is in more than God, the good/evil angels, & human beings, + dolphins, chimps, & a few other "higher" animals. The Gaia Hypothesis, that earth is a mind, is excessive; but that Mind, God's Mind, sustains & penetrates the world, the universe, is biblical. As our loves reflect the great Love, our minds dimly but truly reveal the great Mind. Here's a biological basis for vision.

(2) Wm. James' THE VARIETIES OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE (1901) puts in classic form the psychological basis for vision. After massing his evidence, he concludes that "We may well believe, as to proofs that religious experience affords, that higher powers [his metaphysical pluralism] exist and are at work to save the world." (From this book, AA-founder Bill Wilson wrote "Higher Power" into the first of the twelve steps.) The conversion experience, says James, heightens-widens-deepens one's seeing of the world. I define a religion as "a way of seeing, & living in, the world." "Vision," Latin for "seeing," is a good word for the effect of the conversion experience, a higher word to suggest being addressed, spoken to, by a Higher Power, & told to live a higher life.