LESSON 1

Introduction: Man's Search for Truth

Man is on a continuing search for truth. He is never completely satisfied. Each new discovery reveals new glimpses or insights into truth. In turn, each new insight beckons him to an additional search for truth. This is just as true in the area of the daily life of the Christian as it is anywhere else. This means that the search for truth should not be and is not exclusively the concern of the scientist, the philosopher, or the scholar. Each of us, regardless of our age or maturity is, consciously or unconsciously, on a constant search for truth. We seek answers to questions and solutions to problems that arise in the process of making daily decisions.

Man continuously searches for _____.

(truth)

Each person daily faces many problems for which he seeks _____.

(solutions)

Daily Decisions and the Search

Some of the questions and problems are in the area of personal morality, others in the realm of social morality. At this stage, let us restrict ourselves to one example primarily but not exclusively in the personal area. A consideration of this problem will reveal how complex many decisions are and how diligently one needs to search for truth as he makes a decision.

Let us consider a case of pregnancy before marriage. There are many questions that may be and in most cases should be asked and answered. Should the couple marry? Have an abortion? Or have the baby outside of marriage? If they should marry only under certain conditions, what are those conditions? Should the parents try to force a marriage? Should the minister perform the marriage ceremony? Always or only under some conditions? If it would be better for the girl to have the baby outside of marriage, why? Where can she go to have it? If she has the baby outside of marriage, should she keep it, permit her parents or some other relative to have it, or let it be adopted through regular child-placing channels? Whose welfare should be given primary consideration in making the decision: the relatives, the mother, the father, the baby? Who should have the primary responsibility in making the decision? Should the father be responsible for the expenses of the birth of the baby?

What should be the attitude of the young woman and the young man towards the experience they have had? What should be the attitude of the parents of the young man? What should be the attitude of the parents of the young woman towards her, towards the father of the child, and towards his parents? What about the church and church members? What about the attitude towards all concerned? What if the couple have married but it is generally know that the young woman was pregnant before marriage? How should they be received in and by the church family?

Many people are involved in making decisions, some of

Is the following statement true or false?

The complexity of making moral decisions can be illustrated by a case of pregnancy before marriage. _____

(true)

which are as crucial and involved as the preceding. Among these are decisions not only regarding sex before marriage but also sex outside of marriage, divorce, remarriage, smoking, drinking, drugs, participation in war, and others. Some of the more pressing contemporary social issues, some of which have noticeable personal aspects or implications are: abortion, euthanasia, pollution, urban deterioration, and capital punishment. Most of these and additional problems will be discussed later.

Source of the Search

Back of the man's search for truth in relation to the immediate problems of his life is a general search for truth as such. In turn, the latter helps to explain our search for truth in the areas of everyday Christian living. Our never-ending search for truth, whether truth in general or in its application to specific situations, stems to a considerable degree from the nature of man. Created in the image of God, man has had that image marred but not totally destroyed by sin. Sin has affected every area of his life. This means, among other things, that his knowledge of truth is limited. But there is enough of the image of God retained to make man conscious of his limited insight into the truth and at the same time to create within him a restless searching for the truth.

We can be assured that as we search for God or *The Truth*, and the source of all truth, God is also searching for us. We search for the Searcher. There is a sense in which the source of man's search for truth is in God rather than in man. Certainly, the source of the image of God in man is God Himself.

Goal of the Search

Men may be unconscious of the fact, but the ultimate goal of their search for truth or meaning is *the Truth* or God. In Him they find the source of truth and that which gives unity to truth. It is *the Truth* that satisfies man's deepest search for truth. It was Augustine who said, "Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless, until it repose in Thee." In a very true sense, God is both the source of man's search for the truth and the ultimate goal of that search.

The statement was made previously that man's search for truth will not be satisfied until he discovers *the Truth*. This discovery comes when man is brought into union with Christ. It is this experience that restores the marred image of God in man. There remains, however, a perplexing and potentially a very meaningful paradox. When one is brought into union with the resurrected Christ, his search or quest for *the Truth* or for true meaning in life is ended. But just as surely a new quest begins. This quest will continue until the end of life's journey.

Still another way of stating the same marvellous paradox is to suggest that through our union with Christ the image of God has been restored, but it is not completely restored. The full restoration will not come until the end of life when we shall awake in His likeness. Now we see through a glass darkly as in an old mirror. Then we shall see clearly. The incompleteness of the restoration of the image of God explains the continuing restlessness in the life of the child of God. There is within the serious

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Are the following statements true or false?

1. *Sin marred but did not destroy God's image in man.* _____
2. *Man knows that his understanding of truth is limited.* _____
3. *Man does not have a restless desire for truth.* _____

(1.true; 2.true; 3.false)

The source of man's search for truth is found in _____ *rather than* _____.

(God, man)

God is also the goal of man's _____.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

Man discovers truth when he is brought into _____ *with* _____.

(union, Christ)

Is the following statement true or false?

Through union with Christ the image of God is completely restored. _____

(false)

Christian an abiding tension between the complete and the incomplete, the perfect and the imperfect, the whole and the partial. It seems that the more completely one comprehends the truth, the more conscious he is of falling short not only in his knowledge of truth but also in the appropriation and application of truth in his life. Many of us can say with Paul, "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.... I can will what is right, but I cannot do it" (Rom. 7:15, 18). And our experience is that these things have been distressingly true after we became Christians as well as before. In other words, the goal of our searching and striving is never fully realized or attained.

Approaches in the Search

Broadly speaking, man has made three approaches in his search for truth: the scientific, the philosophical, and the religious. Some acquaintance with these approaches can be of value and should be of interest to Christian men and women in general and not exclusively to scholars.

Generally speaking, science seeks to understand the world of nature; philosophy attempts to understand man and his place in the universe; while religion and specifically theology seek to understand God and His relation to nature and man. Science searches for truth primarily by analysing the observable phenomena of the natural order. Philosophy uses the rational approach in its search for truth. Religion in general and theology in particular claim a unique divine revelation of truth. From the perspective of the Christian religion, an effort is made to comprehend and to interpret truth as revealed in nature and in man, but ultimately and pre-eminently in Christ.

Each of these approaches can properly be considered a good gift from God. Each is autonomous, to a considerable degree, but they also are closely interrelated, with each making some contributions to the other. Furthermore, since God is the source of all truth, there cannot be any real conflict between science, philosophy, and religion. When any conflict arises, it is due to incompleteness or immaturity in one or more of these areas.

The one thing that distinguishes more pointedly than anything else the approaches to truth of science but particularly of philosophy and the Christian religion is the difference in their point of reference or place of beginning. The Christian approach begins with God, the philosophical approach with man. Although both have a place for faith and reason, the Christian approach begins with faith, the philosophical with reason. The former centres on what God in Christ has done, the latter on what man can do. A distinctly Christian approach to truth may make use of the rational, but it begins with the self-revelation of God as recorded in the Scriptures and as climaxed in His Son. While the Christian may admit the possibility of revelation in the areas of philosophy and science, he contends that Christian thought is grounded basically in a unique or special revelation of the redemptive truth of God. He also believes that although Jesus gives the answers to man's moral problems and perplexities, far more important is the fact that He *is* the answer. The Christian believes (1) that Christ has revealed in His life God's

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List three approaches man uses to seek truth.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

(Compare your answers with the text.)

Religion in general and theology in particular claim a unique _____ _____.

(divine, revelation)

Since God is the source of all truth, there cannot be any real conflict between _____, _____, *and* _____.

(science, philosophy, religion)

The Christian approach begins with _____, *the philosophical with* _____.

(God, man)

Christian thought is grounded basically in the special revelation of the _____ _____ *of God.*

(redemptive, truth)

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ultimate ideal for man, and (2) that man's union with the resurrected Christ creates within him the desire, the dynamic, the power to move towards God's ideal or purpose for him. This has tremendous significance for the Christian ethic and the Christian life in general.

Historically speaking, the Christian movement has been largely shaped by two streams of influence: the Jewish and the Grecian. The first represents the revelational approach to truth, the latter the philosophical or rational approach. The Jewish influence was particularly pronounced in original Christianity. Some Greek influence is seen in Paul and in John, but even they were basically Jewish in their perspective. The Grecian influence became more pronounced in post-New Testament times. Many of the early Church Fathers were students of Greek philosophy before their conversion to Christianity. They did not and could not leave all that influence behind.

The Christian movement has been largely shaped by two streams of influence: the _____ and the _____.

(Jewish, Grecian)

The Christian Ethic and the Search

Now, in a more specific way, how is the Christian ethic related to man's search for truth and to the approaches he has made in that search? Ethics is clearly an integral phase of man's search for truth. And like other areas of man's knowledge of the truth, it remains incomplete with an openendedness towards truth. This means, among other things, that Christian ethics needs the insights of philosophy and science to help fill out its knowledge of the truth and to test and clarify its interpretation of revealed truth.

Also, the various approaches to truth interpenetrate one another in the search for truth in the area of moral decisions as well as in other areas. One's emphasis in the search for truth will determine, to a considerable degree, the place of science, philosophy, and religion in the search. From the viewpoint of moral decisions, if one's emphasis is primarily on basic concepts, ideas, or principles, then philosophy and/or theology will have a major place in his search for truth. In contrast, the greater one's interest in the application of truth to particular problems and situations the more important will be the sciences and particularly social sciences. For example, in a very real sense, Christian social or applied ethics is a middle discipline, standing between theology and the social sciences. Those who work in the area look to theology for their basic stance and to the social sciences for factual knowledge concerning social problems and for an understanding of the structures and techniques that will help them to apply Christian principles more effectively to the problems of the world. For example, Christians in their attempt to speak effectively to such contemporary problems as abortion, race relations, unemployment, war, and peace are heavily indebted to and dependent upon the social sciences such as psychology and sociology.

Is the following statement true or false?

The place of philosophy, science, and religion in the search for truth is determined by one's emphasis.

_____

(true)

In attempting to speak effectively on contemporary problems, Christians are heavily indebted to and dependent upon the social sciences such as _____ and _____.

(psychology, sociology)

Christian Ethics, Theology, and the Search

The Christian in the pew as well as the pulpit has a theology and also an ethic. His basic ideas concerning God, man, sin, salvation, and related theological concepts, along with his ideas concerning right and wrong, will be determining factors in his

daily decisions. The two, theology and ethics, are closely related in our search for truth. They are both basically revelational in approach. The ultimate goal of the search in both areas is the same: the knowledge of *the Truth*. Both are grounded in the will and nature of God. They belong together. They represent two sides of the same coin. In the Scriptures and in the early Church period, with rare exceptions, they were not clearly separated.

In spite of the close relation of theology and ethics, it should be recognized that they, to some degree, are distinct and supplement one another. Ethics looks back to theology; theology looks forward to ethics. Theology provides the foundation; ethics builds the superstructure on the foundation. Both are essential for the completion of the building. When we say that theology is the foundation, it does not mean that theology is divorced from life. As John Calvin said, "Doctrine is not an affair of the tongue, but of the life." He insisted that "it must be transfused into the breast, and pass into the conduct, and so transform us into itself."[1]

The consideration of Christian ethics as a separate discipline is justified in the contemporary period. This is true because of the prevalence and complexity of modern moral and social problems. A separate emphasis on Christian ethics is also justified because of the tendency to neglect it. Furthermore, when theologians speak in the area of everyday Christian living, many of them tend to be too exclusively theoretical and speculative. In contrast, the Christian ethicist, even when he is most theoretical, has or should have a major interest in the application of theory to actual life situations. In conclusion, Christian ethics should acknowledge its close relation and its indebtedness to theology, but at the same time it should insist that it has a distinctive emphasis and contribution to make to the Christian life.

Christian Ethics, Philosophical Ethics, and the Search

Christian ethics and philosophical ethics represent, to a considerable degree, distinctive approaches in man's search for truth. Philosophical ethics uses the rational approach, while a distinctly Christian ethic begins with a unique revelation of truth. In the former, the search is for truth; in the latter, the search is for an understanding of the truth that has been given or revealed. The division, however, between philosophical and Christian ethics should not be drawn too sharply. Each has its own distinctive contribution to make. Each can enrich the other. And after all, our sovereign God is concerned for the totality of life, which means that He may be concerned about and active in the area of philosophical ethics as well as in the area of Christian ethics.

Although we believe that philosophical ethics can make some distinctive contributions to our knowledge of ethics, we do think that Christian and philosophical ethics differ in many and important respects. The distinctive elements of the Christian ethic stem

The knowledge of the truth is the ultimate goal of both theology and _____.

(ethics)

List reasons that justify Christian ethics as a separate discipline today.

_____

_____

_____

_____

(Compare your answers with the text.)

Is the following statement true or false?

Christian ethics has a close relation to theology but should not insist on making a distinctive emphasis to the Christian life. _____

(false)

Christian ethics searches for an understanding of truth that has been _____.

(given)

The distinctive elements of the Christian ethic is centred in

[1]John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. by J. Beveridge (James Clarke & Co., 1949), II, 4.

from the fact that it is centred in God rather than in man. For example, the supreme value, from the perspective of philosophical ethics, is always grounded in or directed towards man. It is pleasure, wisdom, or pure contemplation. In contrast, the supreme good or value in the Christian ethic is centred in God. It is the promotion of the Kingdom of God.

Likewise, the source of authority differs in the two. In philosophical ethics, it centres in man: his reason or his conscience. In Christian ethics, it centres in God and His will. Reason or the rational nature may and should be used in the Christian's search for the will of God, but reason is a means or instrument in the search and not its end. And since there is perfect harmony in God, the will of God is expressive of and evolves from His nature. This means that authority for the child of God ultimately rests in the nature of God.

A distinctive aspect of the Christian ethic is the fact that it, through the faith on which it is grounded, has an answer for sin, which is man's basic problem. The grace of God provides the remedy for man's sin. This gives to the Christian a deep and unique sense of responsibility. This means, contrary to the position of some contemporary situationalists, that there is an important place for a sense of obligation or the imperative in the Christian ethic. However, in the Christian ethic as in the Christian life in general, the imperative is preceded by the indicative, oughtness by isness. An obligation is placed upon us by what God, through His grace, has done for us.

Ours is an ethic of grace, a grace that first speaks to us in the indicative mood but then speaks just as surely in the imperative mood. Really, these two, the indicative and the imperative, alternate; there is a constant interplay of the two. It could not be otherwise because of the dynamic nature of the Christian faith. It is never static; there is constant movement. This involves a movement from the indicative to the imperative followed by a movement back to pick up a new indicative or at least a deepened insight into the indicative.

The ethic of the grace or goodness of God also provides a distinctive dynamic or motivation. The Christian, through his union with the resurrected Christ, has a deep inner desire to show by the quality of life he lives his appreciation for what God has done for him. He also discovers that he moves towards the purposes of God in his life as he permits the resurrected Christ to live in him and express Himself through him. That which was a potentiality in the initial experience we had with the Lord should be permitted to become a living, dynamic reality in our lives. The movement of the Christian life is from within outward. In other words, the Christian ethic, as it finds expression in daily Christian living, is not something put on from the outside; it is something that naturally and inevitably evolves from an inner relationship. The ultimate ideal for the Christian is a complete harmony between the inner and the outer, between what the Christian does and what he wants to do.

_____. Philosophical ethics on the other hand is directed towards _____.

(God, man)

Authority for the child of God ultimately rests in the _____ of _____.

(nature, God)

Because of what God, through grace, has done for us, an _____ is placed upon Christians.

(obligation)

There is constant movement in _____ _____.

(Christian, faith)

The ultimate ideal for the Christian is a complete harmony between the _____ and the _____.

(inner, outer)

Christian Ethics and the Christian Life

Christian ethics is basically an attempt to study and interpret the Christian life. It may become largely an intellectual exercise restricted primarily to the academic community. This may not be particularly damaging in a period of relative stability. It is most unfortunate, however, for ethics to be divorced from daily life and problems in a time of world revolution such as the contemporary period. If Christian ethics is to be relevant to and a vital factor in the life of the world, it must move out where people live. There is some question whether ethics in general and Christian ethics in particular can separate itself from life. The decisions and problems of the world and the peoples of the world provide the content of ethics. In turn, the more perplexing and pressing the problems of life, the more important it is for all of us in pew and pulpit, in schoolroom and sanctuary, to study Christian ethics.

Christian ethics may be defined as critical reflection on the moral decisions and actions of individual Christians and of the Christian community. Christian ethics performs both an analytical and a perspective function, with the former preceding the latter. These two, the analytical and prescriptive, are closely related to the indicative and the imperative, mentioned previously. It makes little difference which of these is considered most important, just so it is recognized that there is a place for both.

The analytical and prescriptive functions are not as sharply differentiated as some seem to think. When Christian ethics is primarily analytical, the prescriptive element is present, at least to a tentative degree, as a basis for the analysis. John Bennett's relatively well-known definition of Christian ethics could be interpreted from either the analytical or prescriptive perspective. He says, "Christian ethics is the name given to the attempt to think through the implications of Christian faith for the moral life." While the analytical element is primary in this definition—"to think through"—yet a prescriptive or imperative element is present. For there to be any "implications of the Christian faith for the moral life," "the Christian faith" and "the moral life" would have to have some tangible content.

For Lehmann, Christian ethics, *"is the reflection upon the question, and its answer: What am I, as a believer in Jesus Christ and as a member of his church, to do?"*[2] Again, let us suggest that one has to know something about the kind or quality of life "a believer in Jesus Christ" will or should live, if he is to know what to do. One must know what and who he is if he is to know what to do. One must scrupulously avoid the words "ought" and "should", but there is present an element of obligation whatever may be one's approach to Christian ethics and to the Christian life.

Is the following statement true or false?

If Christian ethics is to be relevant to and a vital factor in the life of the world, it must move out where people live.

_____

(true)

Define Christian ethics.

_____

_____

_____

(Compare your answer with the text.)

John Bennett says, "Christian ethics is the name given to the attempt to think through the implications of Christian _____ *for the* _____ *life."*

(faith, moral)

A believer must know what and who he is if he is to know what to _____.

(do)

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[2]Paul L. Lehmann, *Ethics in a Christian Context* (Harper & Row, 1963), p. 25.

Christian ethics and the Christian's daily life interact on one another. There are abiding values in the historic content of the Christian ethic, but it is constantly in the process of reformulation because of the changing experiences and problems of people. What a theology teacher of mine said about theology could also be said concerning the Christian ethic. His statement was: "Every generation needs to rewrite its theology." This must be true, to some degree, of the Christian ethic if it is to meet the needs of changing situations. This means that the Christian ethic, at any particular point in time, is a product, to some degree, of Christian experience. The preceding statement does not necessitate the elimination of or even the diminution of the importance of certain basic moral concepts or principles of our Christian faith. It does suggest a fresh interpretation of those concepts and new insights into their application to daily Christian living. It also means that the formulation of the Christian ethic at any particular time is provisional in some ways and to some degree. Room must be left for new insights in the light of changing situations.

As implied in the preceding, the provisional nature of the Christian ethic at any particular time stems not only from the contemporary situation but also from the nature of the Christian ethic and the Christian faith. The Christian faith, with its ethic, is beyond the complete comprehension of man. He is constantly discovering new facets and getting a deeper understanding of his faith and its ethic. Some of these insights are the result of man's attempt to apply what he knows to the changing problems and challenges of his life.

Christian ethics is a product of _____ .

(Christian, experience)

The Christian faith, with its ethic, is beyond the complete _____ *of man.*

(comprehension)

Home Study Exercise

Basic activity (Levels 1, 2, and 3). After reading the study guide text, answer the following questions.

1. What is one purpose for man's search for truth? _____
2. Name six examples where one is required to make moral decisions. _____
3. What is the source of man's search for truth? _____
4. What is the source of God's image within man? _____
5. Name the goal of humanity's search for truth. _____
6. How does man discover the truth? _____

7. What explains the continuing restlessness in the life of the child of God? _____

8. List and give a brief explanation of the three approaches man has made in his search for truth. _____

9. According to Maston, what causes conflict between science, philosophy, and religion? _____

10. What one thing most pointedly distinguishes the approaches of philosophy and the Christian religion? _____

11. What is the point of reference for:
    (1) The Christian religion _____
    (2) Philosophy _____

12. What are the two streams of influence in the historical Christian movement? _____

    What approach does each represent? _____

13. Why does Christian ethics need the insights of the other disciplines? _____

14. In what ways are theology and ethics related in our search for truth? _____

15. List three differences in philosophical ethics and Christian ethics.

16. What does a believer in Christ need to know in order to live the Christian life? _____

Supplementary activity (Levels 2 and 3). The following activities are based upon the study guide text.

1. Describe man's search for truth.
2. Explain the author's viewpoint in his discussion of the conflict between the complete and the incomplete, the whole and the partial. Give additional Scripture references to support his argument.
3. Compare the approaches used by man in his search for truth.
4. What is meant by the analytical and prescriptive functions performed by Christian ethics?

5. Write your own definition for Christian ethics based on your studies.

Advanced activity (Level 3). The following activities are based on the study guide text.

1. Justify Christian ethics as a separate discipline.
2. Distinguish between Christian ethics and philosophical ethics.
3. Using the author's discussion and Scripture references, write a sermon that supports the theme: "God's Answer to Man's Sin." (Students who are not pastors or studying to be pastors may prepare a Bible lesson instead.)

Seminar Discussion

1. Discuss the source and goal of man's search for truth. Be sure to include the concepts of the image of God and how one discovers truth.
2. Discuss the approaches to truth and how they relate to each other.
3. Discuss the importance of point of reference to Christian ethics.
4. Compare Christian ethics and philosophical ethics.
5. Discuss the relation of Christian ethics to daily life.
6. Define Christian ethics.
7. Level 3 students should share their sermons. The seminar leader should lead a discussion of the content of the sermons.