

# CLASS NOTES FOR CHRISTIAN ETHICS

BIBLICAL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

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## INTRODUCTORY CONSIDERATIONS

### A. Definition of Christian Ethics

#### 1. Definition of Ethics

In the Greek, two words are mentioned in connection with ethics:  $\eta\theta\omicron\varsigma$  -- "character" or "disposition," and  $\epsilon\theta\omicron\varsigma$  -- "custom" or "habit."

In the Latin, the term philosophia moralis ("moral philosophy" or "moral science") is used.

Ethics has to do with morality, with right and wrong, good and bad. It is the science of duty, of moral principles, of moral judgment and conduct.

"Moral" pertains to character, conduct, intentions, social relations as characterized by excellence, or as conforming to a standard of what is good and right.

Ethics deals with human behavior, for only personal beings are moral creatures.

To put it in the words of Dirk Jellema, in his chapter on Ethics in Contemporary Evangelical Thought, edited by Carl Henry, "ethics is an organized statement, based upon a comprehensive world-outlook, of what man should do in his contemporary situation."

Since we are moral creatures, possessing conscience, we find ourselves constantly passing judgment upon our own and other human beings' actions, regarding them as right or wrong, good or bad.

As a working definition, we will employ the following:

Ethics is a reflection upon our conduct, together with a judgment upon the morality of it.

Ethics, then, is the science of moral conduct. In this discipline of study, we ask the question, "What does it mean to live the good life?"