

Bible & Ethics

Birch & Rasmussen

1

Biblical Ethics Is Not Same As Christian Ethics

- We face issues today as Christians that are simply not mentioned in the Bible
 - E.g., cloning, stem cell research, nuclear warfare, ozone depletion, etc.
- Even with similar issues such as feeding the hungry, the context is radically different
 - E.g., sharing from our pantry versus federal aid
- As a faith that understands God working in history, faith and ethics is dynamic, not static
 - E.g., role of patriarchy

2

Bible Is Nonetheless Formative and Normative for Christian Ethics

- How does “formative” and “normative” relate to Lovin’s categories?
- Bible is major source of our knowledge about center of Christian moral allegiance, God in Jesus Christ (14)
- Central question is what role does the Bible play in Christian ethics?

3

Christian Ethics is Community Ethics

- For B & R, a starting point of ethics is community
 - We are fundamentally social beings
 - Even moral ideas associated with individualism, like conscience, come out of community formation ("knowing together") (18)
 - Community is not only source of moral life, it is source of Christian faith

4

Community: Basis of Christianity

- B & R look at roots of Christianity in Bible where community is "commanding moral matrix" of both Israel and early church (19)
 - Focus is upon what it means to be the "people of God" not on the nature of universal good
 - Christian ethics is "'theocentric' morality . . . whose form is community"
 - "to be Christian was to learn story of Israel and of Jesus and the ongoing church traditions well enough to experience the world from within those stories, and to act in keeping with that experience, as a member of that community" (21)

5

People of the Way

- The early name and key metaphor of Christian movement was "the way"
- "the image is that of a goal-oriented journey in which the manner of journeying is itself a constituent part of the pilgrimage" (22)
 - Relate to Lovin
- Koinonia is community/fellowship
- Ekklesia or church referred to an assembly of citizens
- Israel understood itself as called to be a people, "social embodiment of faith in the one God" (26)

6

Movement Away from Communal

- Greek dualism, especially of spirit/body
- Constantinian cooption of church as an extension of civic influence
- Enlightenment emphasis upon individual autonomy rather than "heteronomy"
- In short, movement from "Koinonia ethics, i.e., community-creating human relatedness rooted in a compelling experience of God" (31)

7

Scripture in Ekklesia

- "Scriptures were not so much a fixed moral deposit for these communities as they were precious community records of what it meant in varied times and places under varied conditions to try to be Israel or to try to be a Christian people of God" (32)

8

Charting the Moral Life

- Go over chart on p. 39 – compare to Lovin
- Scripture plays key role in formation and transformation of personal moral identity (45)
 - Within context of community of faith
 - More indirect means of moral formation than direct exhortation
- What happened in the Shantung Compound Experience summarized on pp. 48-50?
 - What does the story tell us about virtue and values (relate to Lovin)?

9



Other Comparisons With Lovin

- B & R talk about virtue, value, and obligation which have obvious correlations with Lovin
- What do they mean by "Vision" and how does that relate to Lovin? (See 58)
 - Examples?
 - Anthropocentrism
 - Male privilege
 - White privilege
 - Nature of God as transcendent or immanent
