

Christian Ethics and Social Action  
**Values Day - Sunday 7th February 2016**  
**A Moral Revolution**

by Andy Wilcock

## **Introduction**

Following on from my President's Address at Conference June 2015, we are looking to examine the subject of Morality, and how the 'moral values' of the cultures around us have shifted in recent times. These shifts have impacted our society, and not least by the way our politicians are formulating the laws of the land based on public opinion. No longer do they measuring their decisions by God's word. *(Please visit the CESA section of the [www.thewru.com](http://www.thewru.com) website to download the Audio and Powerpoint of the Address)*

### **Why is this important and why is it a 'Christian Ethics and Social Action' issue?**

It is important, because we are called to live in the real world and not hide away in a monastery. Jesus calls us to be 'salt and light' (Mat 5:13-16) and so it is vital we seek wisdom from God and think through how we are to live in today's society. How to contribute in conversations, when to speak up and challenge, when to ask questions or when to stay quiet?

Many of the issues that concern the C.E.S.A. committee originate from the fact that there is a 'Moral Revolution' going on around us. The society we live in, is still 'highly moral', it's just that the 'morals' themselves are changing. So for instance the Victorian era was known for its traditional, legalistic approach to courtship, wedlock, class barriers and children born out of wedlock. In 2016 the UK society prides itself as broken free from that 'moral', 'judgmental', and restrictive past; yet this liberated society and cultures are still just as 'judgmental' and 'moralistic'. What of those who have found themselves on the wrong side of the 'Sexual Freedom' debate or with regards to Political Correctness or what about the judgmental nature of the way we are expected to look. All the feelings of guilt and worthlessness that used to be associated with sin are now felt by those who don't look 'Thin Enough', or have just the right shape etc.

We need to realise that just as Jesus brought light and hope into the oppressive darkness of the Pharisees of His day, we are called to be a City on a Hill, shining the same light of the same gospel into people's lives and the communities we live in today. The same grace that Nicodemus was confronted with as he met Jesus at night and the same grace that Saul was confronted with as he met Jesus on the road to damascus, has the same power to liberate those oppressed by the moral judgmental society of today.

Now because our society is changing all the time, our teaching needs to be grappling with these changes at the same pace. We need to be helping our Church people see the society around them for what it is and how the Gospel can counteract its delusions.

## A few examples of what we are talking about

- **It's ok, as long as it doesn't hurt anyone**

This seems to be the 'Rule of Thumb' for most people on how to judge (or justify) their actions. It stems from the importance our society places on the individual and their rights to freedom of expression. "As long as I don't hurt anyone, it's ok to do it".

This is a dangerous, and bankrupt philosophy. How can anyone judge on the spur of the moment, when desire is at its height, the impact their actions will have on other people. Don't we all say after an event 'Isn't hindsight is a wonderful thing!'"

Anne Lakey, was a nationally accredited Headteacher, but it was through receiving this award that a former pupil contacted the police and she was arrested, tried and sentenced to eight years in prison. As an RE teacher in her twenties, she had sex with boys aged 13 & 15. Maybe at the time she or the boys could not see the danger, but it was only when one of the boys grew up and had children of his own, that he realised how abusive and wrong her actions had been. It was only in hindsight as an adult and parent, he could judge the situation differently.

Or the example of the young westerners in their 20's who stripped off on top of a Mount Kinabalu in Malaysia. They all grew up conditioned by 'Western values' of Free Expression and "If it isn't hurting anyone, then - **Just Do It**" (sponsored by Nike). How were they to know the offence and shame they would bring not only on the country they were visiting, but also on themselves and their families back home, as they found themselves on the front off newspapers. The fact that they were not to know, is no excuse, as it highlights how poor their ability to judge a moral decision could be. They probably didn't even consider it a moral call in the first place.

- **Authenticity vs Absolute Truth**

Authenticity has high commodity in today's society, while absolute truth is despised, except when it comes to science discovery. So a discovery by scientists is given almost god like authority, until that is another scientist proves it wrong and replaces it by a new 'truth'. Yet all that scientists have proved is a fact. For instance science can give us the facts on how a piano works, but science can't create and play great music and more importantly tell us why it's beautiful?

Now authenticity is societies struggle with this inconsistency. They believe science to be infallible, yet when presented with a piece of computerised music, they are left feeling cheated and empty. When script writers produce TV Soaps, based on tried and tested formulas, the audience hungers for real life. So the TV companies responded by giving us Reality Shows like Big Brother, I'm a Celebrity and Strictly Come Dancing. Yet even these fail; because the audience is desperate for real 'authentic' life and relationships. So they now turn to Facebook or Instagram, and still they hunger as they view at a distance the 'not so authentic' lives of their friends.

When we come to the Bible, we are presented with Absolute Truth, not as a fact, or a concept, but the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the only person who can lay claim to True Authenticity, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life". And it is only in Jesus that we find true life and fulfilment.

The problem with our society's take on 'authenticity' is that it isn't measured against anything. So as long as you are who you are, your 'authentic', and that apparently is good. You could be an authentic drug user, or an authentic alcoholic, "He kept swearing and smoking right to the end!" Now when Jesus challenged the Pharisees of their hypocrisy, he was measuring them against

the law, and found them wanting! Jesus was showing the only way someone can live a Truthful life is to give their lives to The Truth of Life.

- “Take up your cross and follow me” (Mat 16:24),
- Jesus told him, “If you want to be perfect, go and sell all your possessions and ...give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” (Mat 19:21),
- “Follow me and I will make you fishers of men” (Mat 4:19)

## **Where do we stand, in light of the Bible, Jesus & God?**

It is vital that we understand where we stand on the issues of morals, and how we take up that position. We must be drawn more to the Grace of Jesus Christ and the humility He displayed in His life, and realise that people can only be saved through giving their lives to Jesus, not by a moral revolution in their life. That moral revolution will only come about through the power of the Gospel (Rom 1:16, 2 Cor 5:17), and transforming work of the Holy Spirit (John 16:8, 1 Cor 6:11).

A group of non-christian students were asked to analyse the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5,6,7). Their conclusion was that they are impossible to live by. Fifty years ago the vast majority of people had attended Sunday School and had a basic understanding of the Ten Commandments and that Sin was offending the Holy God of the Bible. But they also knew that Jesus forgives sin, that He died for them and His resurrection gives us eternal hope. Today the vast majority of grandparents and parents have never been to church, so when they hear the term ‘SIN’ they do not consider it to have any relation to the love of God or the forgiveness Jesus offers. They just think we are personally judging, cursing them and feel superior to them.

Have a read of Romans 5 and see the emphasis Paul places on Jesus Christ when referring to sin. Virtually every verse that mentions sin, is counteracted with an aspect of the message of the Gospel and Grace.

Romans 5:17 For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!

18 Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.

19 For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

### **Dealing with Sin in our own lives.**

If we are going to make an impact on those around us with the love of Christ through our lives and words, we must condemn the sin in our own lives. Nailing it to the cross, by confessing it to our Lord and Saviour. We need to seek the work of the Holy Spirit to identify sin in our lives, John 16:8 “When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment:”

But we must not see the work of Christ and His Spirit in our lives as a reason to raise ourselves up above our neighbours, in pride and judgment, but in humility show them the love of Christ.

We do however need to stand up and be counted, in defending the poor and vulnerable. I remember reading of Hudson Taylor, when living in a town in a remote part of China. A traveling fair set up on the outskirts of the town, not like the rides and shows we have today, but as a brothel. In the evening all the men of the town, left their homes, wives and children to go to the fair. Hudson Taylor and his colleagues in great fear for their lives, walked into the center of the event, and stood up and challenged the men. He said, “These girls are the ages of your own children and are themselves someone’s daughter.” Instead of being lynched the men in shame returned home.

## **Application and Activities to suit your congregation**

## **“You can’t judge me for my lifestyle, I can’t help the way I was born.”**

Genesis 14 speaks of a city which for those who lived there was a utopia, where everything was YES & YES. In fact the only thing that was unacceptable was ‘No’ & ‘No’. We know it was a utopia because Lot and some of his family had to be dragged out of the city, and his wife turned in regret of leaving it, even as the judgment fell.

### **How can grace come out of such a situation?**

Lot fled with his two daughters to the hills and lived in the caves. A sort of parallel to Adam and Eve after they left Eden in shame. Yet the sin continues with both Lot's daughters having a son by the father. These two boys became the founders of the nations of Moab and Ammon.

So through out the Old Testament when we hear of these two nations, we know their origin came from an incestuous relationship, of the only family to escape the brimstone of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Yet later in the Bible we hear of a Moabite Widow, who moves to Bethlehem with her Hebrew mother-in-law, also widowed, and marries Boaz. She enters the Royal line from Abraham to King David, and in the Gospel of Matthew she is listed in the Genealogy of Jesus Christ.

A similar study could be made of Rahab the prostitute, in Joshua 2. Her's was the only family to survive the fall of Jericho, a cursed city. Yet she too marries into the Royal line and is included in Matthew's Genealogy of Jesus Christ.

Both these women were born into situation they had no control over, one to the nation of Moab the other into the cursed city of Jericho, that led to her living as a prostitute. We are not told if she had any say in her situation. Yet both were received and welcomed into the Royal family of David and Jesus Christ and celebrated in the introduction of the Gospels and the New Testament.

## **Activities**

### **General**

thoughts

10 Commandments

Doing what is right regardless

## **All age service**

### **Teenagers**

#### **Dilemmas game**

**How to play** : Place three letters A, B, C on separate walls of the room. Get everyone to stand in the middle of the room, and then read out a Dilemma. Ask them to choose by standing by their chosen letter. Then ask further questions to find out why they chose that letter.

Explain what a Dilemma is - “It's where there are three possible choices in your life, all which could be legitimate, and the dilemma is which one to chose. “

You could give each person in the group a piece of paper with one of the following statements, telling them how to act on each dilemma. You could maybe ask a few people to respond normally. After a few goes, get them to swap papers.

I. Do what God says is right

II. Do what you feel is right at the time - e.g. Am I hurting anyone?

III. Do what your friends think would be cool

Here's two examples for you.....

1) **What are you doing this evening?**

- A) Your friends have invited you to see a film you really want to see, but it's an IMAX showing and will cost £12.30
- B) The Great British Bakeoff is on TV
- C) You promised to play badminton with your younger sister

2) **Robinhood - You discover your friend is burgling houses, but he is selling what he steals and giving it all to a local children's charity.**

- A) Tell the police what is happening.
- B) Challenge your friend and tell him he needs to stop
- C) Ask him if you can join him on the next job

Notes : Ask those who chose B & C - How long will it take the police to ultimately catch him anyway? What will happen to the charity when they are found to be using stolen money? Which option is plainly right in the eyes of God, the Law, the Children's Charity and the owners of the homes that were burgled?