

Biblical Ethics

When we use the word 'ethics' to designate a way of life we are not necessarily using the expression 'way of life' in an appreciative sense. It may be used depreciatively. Hence, when we wish to evaluate a way of life, we are required to qualify it in some way as good or bad, as Christian or un-Christian.

The New Testament, however, has a distinctly appreciative use of the expression 'the way'. The Christian confession and manner of life are characterized as 'the way' or 'that way' (Acts 9: 2; 19: 9, 23; 22: 4; 24: 22). We can hardly dissociate this absolute use of the word 'way' from the word of our Lord, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life' (John 14: 6), even though it is difficult to define the line of connection.

In any case this nomenclature does evince the total distinctiveness of the faith, worship, and life of the disciples of Christ. And this distinctiveness found its focal point in faith and devotion directed to him who declared himself to be 'the way' as well as the truth and the life. The New Testament does not have a constricted conception of what it calls 'the way'; it does not confine 'the way' to what we so frequently have in view when we speak of the way of life.

This specialized use of the expression 'the way' comprehends all that is distinctive of the Christian faith as 'the way of righteousness' (Matthew 21: 32; II Peter 2: 21), 'the way of salvation' (Acts 16: 17), 'the way of God' (Matthew 22: 16; Acts 18: 26), 'the way of the Lord' (Acts 18:25), 'the right ways of the Lord' (Acts 13: 10), 'the way of truth' (II Peter 2: 2), and 'the way of peace' (Luke 1: 79; Romans 3: 17).

The way of life after the mode of the New Testament usage would comprise far more than falls within the sphere of ethics. Hence, if we use the expression in its more restricted sense as the synonym of ethics, it is not because we are forgetful of the richness and fulness of the New Testament concept of 'the way' as the way of all that belongs to eternal life.

(Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics by John Murray, Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1957, 12; Paragraph structure has been modified)