



The Spirit-filled Life

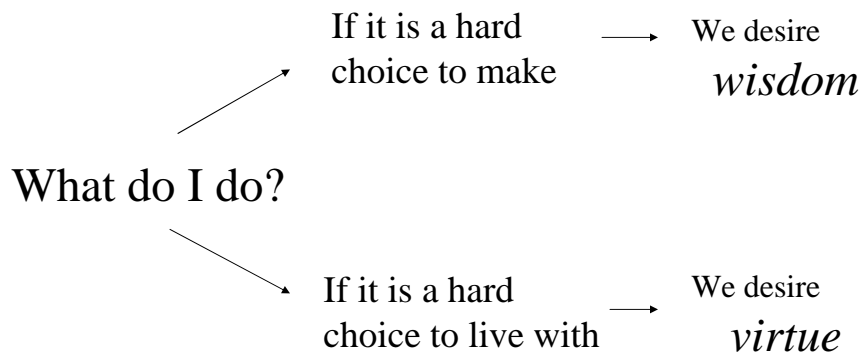
Week 8

Remembering Jesus: Reflections on Christian Ethics

Remembering Jesus: Christian Community, Scripture, and the Moral Life is a book by Allen Verhey that was very helpful with this week's topics. Richard Hays' book, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, is also excellent.



Choices . . . Choices . . . Choices





The “C’s”

Choices

Christians

Community/Church

“full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able to instruct one another”

Here, Paul describes the church in Rome! (Romans 15:14)

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Community

- ❖ God’s Holy Spirit dwells in each believer, all of whom are temples of God.
- ❖ The Church is the temple of God, also indwelt by God’s Holy Spirit.
- ❖ The Holy Spirit is God’s empowering presence in our lives – individually and collectively.
- ❖ So . . . how much help is St. Andrew (the body, not the staff) when it comes to the most significant and difficult choices we face?
 - > Do we lack knowledge?
 - > Or do we lack trust?

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Reminding one another about Jesus

- ❖ Imagine life in the Jerusalem church in the very first years after Jesus.
 - “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers.” (Acts 2:42)
 - These were all means of renewal and restoration in the Holy Spirit!
- ❖ Imagine Peter or Andrew or John telling stories as they remembered Jesus and helped the community to make choices, centered in the mind of Christ.
- ❖ Much of this teaching has been lost . . . but not all. We can still “remember Jesus” in the pages of scripture.

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But . . . there are problems with Scripture

- ❖ Silence
 - Many issues we face are not directly addressed.
- ❖ Strangeness
 - The truth is ancient Israelites and even Jesus lived in a world far different from our own.
- ❖ Diversity
 - Scripture doesn’t always speak with one voice. Start working on the subject of divorce in the Bible and you’ll find out!
- ❖ Difficulty
 - There is better interpretation and poorer interpretation. Sorting it out is often not as straight-forward as we might think.
- ❖ Our own unfamiliarity with the Bible
- ❖ Our refusal to be formed by Scripture
 - Using the Bible as a weapon; supporting what we already “know”

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Still . . . Scripture is the “light to our path”

- ❖ Despite the problems, ignoring Scripture is not an option.
 - The Church defines Scripture and Scripture defines the Church.
 - 2 Timothy 3:16 – the usefulness of Scripture
- ❖ Allen Verhey reminds us that:
 - There is no Christian life that is not shaped *somehow* by Scripture.
 - There is no Christian moral discernment that is not *somehow* shaped by Scripture.
 - There is no Christian ethic that is not *somehow* formed and informed by Scripture.
- ❖ How is Scripture “useful” for the moral life?
 - *Somehow*, when we consider what we ought to do and why, Scripture must be our primary source and guide.

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Somehow . . . But how? (Verhey)

- ❖ We must read and use Scripture humbly.
- ❖ Scripture is to be read in community.
- ❖ We must read it as Canon.
 - We do not read the books of the Bible as merely a collection of ancient texts. The Bible is God's word for his people and our own spiritual journal.
 - We read it as authoritative but what do we really mean? The five-act play.
- ❖ We must read Scripture with *exegetical* care. This is the descriptive task in which scholars of all stripes can help us.
 - *Exegesis* is about finding out the original intent of the words of Scripture. This must come before we try to determine its application in our day (*hermeneutics*).
- ❖ We must read Scripture prayerfully.

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A similar approach (Richard Hays)

- ❖ The Descriptive Task
 - Reading the text carefully – sound exegesis
- ❖ The Synthetic Task
 - Placing the text in canonical context
- ❖ The Hermeneutical Task
 - Relating the text to our situation
- ❖ The Pragmatic Task
 - Living the text
- ❖ Obviously, this is not strictly linear.
 - These four steps overlap in practice. Nonetheless, we still have here a sound process that can guide us as we use Scripture in our moral discourse and discernment.

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An Example – Homosexuality and the Church (from Hays)

- ❖ Reading the texts
 - There are only about a half-dozen references to homosexuality in the Bible. (Compare that to the talk about possessions!)
 - Genesis 19:1-19; Leviticus 18:22, 20:13; 1 Cor 6:9-11, 1 Tim 1:10, Acts 15:28-29
- ❖ Romans 1:18-32
 - The only time homosexuality is referred to in a theological context.
 - This is part of Paul's *diagnosis* of the human condition. Homosexuality is evidence of our rebellion against God. Homosexuality does not provoke God's wrath; it is one consequence of our rebellion and God's willingness to let us go our own way.
 - Romans 2:1 – Those who gleefully join in condemnation of the unrighteous are without excuse themselves. The Gospel levels us all before God!

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Homosexuality in the Canonical Context

- ❖ All references in the Bible condemn homosexual practices.
 - There is really no problem of synthesis; i.e., there need be no weighing of conflicting witnesses.
- ❖ But . . . what is the larger Biblical witness about human sexuality?
 - God created male and female. Our sexual desires rightly find their fulfillment in heterosexual marriage.
 - We are in bondage to sin. We are morally responsible even though we can't help it.
 - Sexuality is not the place we find our identity or meaning and fulfillment. Our identity can be found in God. What truly matters is faith, hope, love, mercy, justice . . .

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Relating the text to today and living it (from Hays)

- ❖ What has been the witness of the Christian church re homosexual practices? Might this change as we learn more?
 - Perhaps, but this happens over long periods of time.
- ❖ Should homosexuals be welcome in the church?
 - Of course!! Do we intend to keep out everyone who sins?
- ❖ Should Christians who have a homosexual orientation engage in homosexual practices?
 - No. The church calls for sexual abstinence from unmarrieds and homosexuals.
- ❖ Should the church bless homosexual unions?
 - No. We bless marriage between a man and a woman.
- ❖ Could persons with a homosexual orientation be ordained?
 - Yes. But they would be expected to abstain from sex, just as would an unmarried pastor. There is no reason to single out clergy from the rest of us. This is the UMC position.

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