

Ethic- Standards

In his essay The Will to Believe, Psychologist William James makes it clear that some choices in life cannot be avoided. Decisions must be made. We are all faced with choices. James says that our whole life hangs upon the choices made. The question is: What principles guide our decision making process? People make decisions on the basis of their convictions. The relationship between doctrine and practice is the relationship between cause and effect. Between September, 1939 and August 24, 1941, some 100,000 German men, women and children were killed under the direction of Dr. Werner Heyde, professor of neurology and psychiatry at the University of the Wurzburg. The selection was based on the law of July 14, 1933, a law designed to "prevent the propagation of congenitally diseased progeny" and on the law of September 15, 1935, "for the protection of German blood and honour." This euthanasia project was based on Nazi ideology and law. In today's Western society, modern moral relativism guides decisions. We no longer have a consensus on moral standards. Paul C. Vitz notes that in the United States the idea is now widespread that each individual has some kind of sovereign right to create, develop, and express whatever values he or she happens to prefer. He says that America has now reached the point where it permits almost everything and stands for almost nothing-except a flabby relativism. What is true of the United States is also true of Canada.

Since standards of morality are dependent on world and life views, which in turn are shaped by doctrine, Christians base their choices on the fundamental teachings of the inerrant Scripture. Christian doctrine provides a framework for Christian living and a public morality. I am thinking of two key Christian doctrines, which form the starting point for Christian conduct. The doctrine of justification by faith teaches the necessity of spiritual renewal. As Martin Luther put it: "It is not good works that makes an individual good, but a good individual who does good works." Conversion leads to a new obedience and lifestyle. The doctrine of original sin makes mockery of man's natural goodness and the inevitable progress of mankind. The brutal savagery in Bosnia and Somalia demonstrate the truth of original sin. Alister McGrath comments, "Doctrine gives substance and weight to what the Christian church has to offer to the world. A Church that despises or neglects doctrine comes perilously close to losing its reason for existence and may simply lapse into a comfortable conformity with the world."

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