

# *Workshops*

# *Exploring*

## **IS CHRISTIAN MORALITY UNIQUE?**

**Part 1**

**Michelle Nailon CSB**



# Workshops Exploring

Is Christian Morality Unique?

Part One

Money, Power, Relationship

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Project Employment Inc.  
Melbourne  
2020

ISBN: 978-0-9805603-5-0

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*A Focus on:*

Money

Power

Relationship

Social Pressures	Commandments
 The word "Power" is written in a stylized, 3D blue font with a purple shadow, set against a white background with purple wavy borders.	<p><b>"Thou shalt not kill"</b></p>
 The word "Relationship" is written in a stylized, 3D blue font with a purple shadow, set against a white background with purple wavy borders.	<p><b>"Thou shalt not commit adultery"</b></p>
 The word "Money" is written in a stylized, 3D blue font with a purple shadow, set against a white background with purple wavy borders.	<p><b>"Thou shalt not steal"</b></p>

**These are basic rules for:**

**Judaism  
Islam  
Christianity**

## Other World Religions

<p><b>Hinduism</b></p> <p>Asserts Duty takes priority over</p>	<p><b>Money</b> <b>Power</b> <b>Relationship</b></p>
<p><b>Buddhism</b></p> <p>Community Members have a Vow Against</p>	<p><b>Killing</b> <b>Adultery</b> <b>Stealing</b></p>
<p><b>Taoism</b></p> <p>Puts forward</p>	<p>Compassion Frugality Not daring to take a lead in the Empire</p> <p>cf. Relationship cf. Money cf. Power</p>
<p><b>AND</b></p>	
<p><b>Catholic Religious</b> <b>have vows of:</b></p>	<p><b>Poverty</b> <b>Chastity</b> <b>Obedience</b></p> <p><b>cf. Money</b> <b>cf. Relationship</b> <b>cf. Power</b></p>

## Where Does Industry Sit?

### Society: a Functional and Organic View

**Social  
Pressures**  
e.g.

### Industrial Classification

#### *Finding Values and Direction*

Power	S	Other Services (e.g. Religion, personal)
Power	R	Arts and Recreation Services

#### *Keeping Society Together*

Power	Q	Health Care and Social Assistance
Power	P	Education and Training
Power	O	Public Administration and Safety

## v *Producing What We Need*

Relationship	A	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing
Relationship	B	Mining
Relationship	C	Manufacturing
Relationship	D	Electricity, Gas and Waste Services
Relationship	E	Construction

## *Moving People and Things Around*

Money	F	Wholesale Trade
Money	G	Retail Trade
Money	H	Accommodation and Food Services
Money	I	Transport, Postal and Warehousing
Money	J	Information, Media and Telecommunications
Money	K	Financial and Insurance Services
Money	L	Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services
Money	M	Professional, Scientific and Technical Services
Money	N	Administrative and Support Services

## How Does Christianity Understand ?

**Money**

**Power**

**Relationship**

Some light may be thrown on this with some



**"Frog in a Pot" Workshops**

## Workshop Exercises on

### *Is Christian Morality Unique? Part One : A Focus on Money, Power and Relationship*

#### Introduction

These exercises are not designed for Christians only. Nor are they designed in an attempt to persuade people to become Christian.

They aim at providing information about what Christianity teaches. Why so? The present Western world has evolved from a Judaic-Christian heritage. There are strengths and weaknesses about this. If people are ignorant about what these are, they can be like the frog in boiling water. The gradual rising of the heat means the frog is unaware of what is going on.

**Part One** of *Is Christian Morality Unique* shows how the early Christians, like their Jewish forebears, put a focus on the commandments about money, power and relationship. There are similarities here with the morality focus of other world religions as well. However the first Christian theologian Paul, actually idealized the commandments so as to incorporate into them the idealism of Greek philosophy. This can be seen in his writings.

Such a “synthesis” of Judaism and Greek Philosophy (Hellenism) was carried on into the writing of the Gospels and their interpretations of the life of Jesus.

**Part Two** of *Is Christian Morality Unique* shows how the gospel writers continued the morality “map” that was set out by Paul.

1. In his gospel structure Mark sets out the overall framework for a Christian society.
2. Matthew provides an interpretation of the life of Jesus from the perspective of a Jewish-based society. Matthew shows the strengths and weaknesses of this society.
3. Luke presents an understanding of Jesus amid the strengths and weaknesses of Hellenism. He also shows how the “hybrid” society was launched.
4. John presents an understanding of the on-going “incarnation’ of Jesus into the world.

In Part Two there is an in-depth discussion about difficulties with interpretation in New Testament studies. Using the Philosopher Gadamer’s *Truth and Method* it is shown how an inherent weakness in Hellenism can result in a narrowing down of New Testament Interpretation.

This illustration in itself shows how people (Christian and non-Christian alike) need to constantly watch out for imbalance in the way they are influenced, or how they think or operate.

2a

<b>LIFE</b>	<b>cf. POWER</b>
<b>SOCIAL SUPPORT</b>	<b>cf. RELATIONSHIP</b>
<b>LIVELIHOOD</b>	<b>cf. MONEY</b>

<b>We all need the above</b>
<b>BUT</b>
<b>CONTROLS</b>
<b>are needed</b>

## Workshops

### Ch. 3 Paul the first Christian Theologian 50's C.E.

1. Would it be logical for Paul to elaborate on the meaning and implications of:
  - Safety for one's means of livelihood (money)
  - Safety for one's body and health (cf. power)
  - Safety for one's basic social support group (sex) ?
  
2. Would this explain any apparent focus on money, power and sex?
  
3. How does money power and sex align with the following statements by Paul?
  - *"Their end is destruction. Their god is their belly and they glory in their shame"*  
(Philippians 3:9)
  
  - Paul said In his own life he has faced rough treatment. He has avoided immorality.  
He has not sought money (cf. Thessalonians 2:2-5)
  
  - (if people be) *"guilty of immorality or greed, or be an idolater, reviler, drunkard or (violent) robber."*  
(1 Cor. 6:9-10).
  
  - Many Corinthians are *"filled, rich and like Kings"* (1 Cor 4:8).
  
  - In contrast to Corinthians the apostles of Jesus have taken on poverty, homelessness and weakness (1 Cor. 4:9-13).
  
  - *"Neither the immoral (nor) thieves (nor) violent robbers.. will inherit the kingdom of God."*  
(1 Cor. 6:9-10)
  
  - *"You then who teach others, (cf. self-determination) will you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery?"* (Rom. 2:21-23).
  
  - *"You shall not commit adultery. You shall not kill. You shall not steal."*  
(Rom. 13:9.)
  
  - Regarding a church leader. *".. he must be irreproachable, never an arrogant or hot-tempered man, nor a heavy drinker nor violent, nor out to make money, but a many who is hospitable and a friend of all that is good..."* (Titus 1:7-8).

## **Ministry of Jesus**

was in the 30's CE

## **Ministry of Paul**

was in the 50's CE

### **Who was Paul?**

Paul was a highly educated Pharisee Jew. He converted to being a follower of Jesus when knocked over by a vision when on his way to imprison Christians.

Within the vision a voice called out "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me." "Who are you Lord?" he answered (the voice said) "I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting."

Paul was also born a Roman Citizen and was he familiar with Greek philosophy.

### **Paul set out to combine**

**Judaism**

**AND**

**Greek Philosophy**

## Ch 4(a) Letters of Paul 50's CE

### Paul's Letter to the Thessalonians as an Introduction to Paul

*Thessalonians* is considered to be Paul's "first" letter. In many ways it is like an introduction to his teaching. He gives special emphasis to the need for hope in a life beyond this one. He teaches that identification with the morality of Jesus is key to this.

*Thessalonians* is defined as a "protreptic" letter which follows a standard Greek format. Such a letter requires the followers of a particular school of thinking to fit in with the behavior expected by the school. In the case of the people in Thessalonica, they are expected to adopt the morality of Jesus. Paul presents himself as a model of such morality. How would he do this?

- Paul says, like the Thessalonians he has suffered rough treatment for adopting this new type of behavior. But he is prepared to put up with this. (cf. "*Thou shalt not kill*") (1 Thess. 2:2)
- Some Thessalonian converts were being pressured to take part in Temple prostitution rites. Paul says "anyone who objects (to the prohibition against fornication) is not objecting to a human authority, but to God who gives you his Holy Spirit" (cf. "*Thou shalt not commit adultery*") (1 Thess 4:8)
- The Roman Empire charged heavy taxes. But there were positive aspects to the Empire's rule. As a city Thessalonica had been loyal to the Emperor. In this way the Thessalonians that Paul addresses have moved beyond economic resentment. Paul encourages them to have a sense of citizenship "so that you are seen to be respectable by those outside the church" (cf. "*Thou shalt not steal*") (1 Thess. 4:12).
- Paul encourages the Thessalonians to adopt Roman symbolism "put on faith and love for a breastplate and the hope of salvation for a helmet" but without adopting their morality (1 Thess. 5:8).
- By identifying with the morality of Jesus these people and their deceased loved ones would share in the resurrected life of Jesus Paul implies that the Emperor, despite his power, does not have such control over eternal life (1 Thess. 4:13-14).

Can you see how Paul encourages the Thessalonians to live with the inadequacies of secular morality without adopting these? (cf. "*Do not model yourselves on the behavior of the world around you*" Romans 12:2).

4a

	
<p><b>Paul Highlights</b></p>	
<p><b>Readiness to respond to the Material Needs of the</b></p>	
<p><b>OTHER</b></p>	

## Ch 4 (b) Paul's Letter to the Phillipians and "Thou shalt not steal"

1. **In Paul's letter to the Phillipians** he praises their generosity (Phil.4:15) . The readiness of these people to support Paul, apparently contrasts with the attitude of some Corinthians. The latter were prepared to pay Paul, but he suspected that this would be on a employer/employee basis (1 Cor 10:14-15).

- Would you consider a readiness to give to someone in a material way because of concern for their welfare, is a reversal of "Thou shalt not steal" ?

2. In the background reading there is reference to the wider social situation that Paul found in his travels e.g. when he stayed at taverns.

- To what extent do you agree that a culture of trying to provide for the material welfare of the needy would help to deter crime?

3. In the background reading reference is made to the scholar Jerome Murphy O'Connor. He claimed Paul was critical of the very basic social structure of the day. He wanted a new type of society.

- Any ideas as to how this could be brought in?

4. Paul's strategy for mission was to set up a community of Followers of Jesus in each of the major urban centres around the Empire.

- What do you think of this approach?

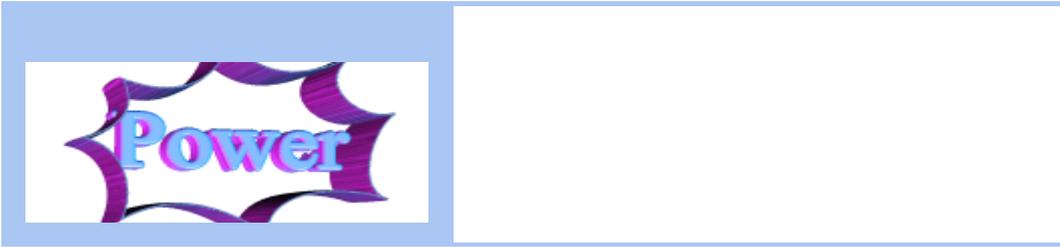
5. The first Chapters of the Acts of the Apostles tells how the first Christians shared their material wealth.

- If members of Paul's communities were helping out the poorer members do you think this would have an impact on the wider urban population?

6. Despite his stress on generosity, Paul did not condone people "living off others." In his letter to the Thessalonians (not the Phillipians) he says:

*We gave you a rule when we were with you, not to let anyone have any food if he refused to do any work. Now we hear that there are some of you who are living in idleness, doing no work themselves but interfering with everyone else's In the Lord Jesus Christ, we order and call on people of this kind to go on quietly working and earning the food that they eat. My brothers, never grow tired of doing what is right." (2 Thess. 3:10b-13).*

- Any comments?



**Paul Highlights**

**Self  
Determination**

**AND THE  
IMPORTANCE OF ONE'S OWN INFORMED**

**Conscience**

## Ch 4(c) Paul's letter to the Galatians and "Thou shalt not kill"

1. **Paul's letter to the Galatians** differs from his letter to the Philippians. He praises the Philippians for their generosity. But he upbraids the Galatians "*People of Galatia. Have you gone mad?*" (Gal 3:1). Jewish Christians (including Peter and Barnabas) were eating apart from Gentile Christians. They were re-imposing circumcision on converts along with the minute regulations of Judaism. Can you think of some results from this ?

2. The Galatians were now allowing Jewish leaders, to dictate and control the minutia of their daily life. Paul opposed this.

- Can you see a connection between self-determination, the exercise of power and "*Thou shalt not kill?*"

3. Paul complains "*some who do not really belong to the brotherhood have furtively crept in to spy on the liberty we enjoy in Christ Jesus, and want to reduce us all to slavery*" (Gal 2:4) Paul wanted people to determine how to keep the commandments according to their own conscience (rather than via rules).

- Would this be a fair interpretation of this verse?
- Do you think some Jewish Christians in Jerusalem could be assuming that because Christians in Antioch had dropped off Jewish rules they had also dropped off observing the commandments as well?
- Would care on the part of the Galatians to protect their own personal freedoms, be related to protecting the right to exercise their own conscience?
- Should people be wary of the extent to which they allow other people (and leaders) to exercise power over their own lives?
- Does this imply that "*Thou shalt not kill*" applies to a need to protect and indeed cultivate one's own self-determination?
- To what extent do you think that others should have the right to determine what is right and wrong for an individual?

4. Paul insisted it is by identifying with the self-giving morality of Jesus, that people "earn" the right to an eternal life. He said that if they rely instead, on keeping a whole complex of rules for their "justification", then there was no point in Christ's death and resurrection (Gal 2:21).

- Does this line of logic make sense?

3. For the Jews, historically speaking, a shared meal with Gentiles was taboo. Yet the key point and time for unity amongst the followers of Jesus was the shared meal of the Eucharist. In his letter to the Galatians Galatians puts stress on the need for unity here. He says: *When I saw they were not respecting the true meaning of the Good News, I said to Cephas (Peter the Apostle) in front of everyone, "In spite of being a Jew, you live like the pagans and not like the Jews, so you have no right to make the pagans copy Jewish ways"* (Gal 2:14)

- In Galatians people are challenged to identify with the free, self-giving spirit of Christ rather than rely on external law. Would you agree?

 A purple starburst shape with the word "Relationship" written inside in a purple, stylized font.	
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**Paul Highlights**

**Your Body is a**

<b>Temple</b>	of the	<b>Holy Spirit</b>
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**Therefore**

<b>Respect</b>	<b>Respect</b>	<b>Respect</b>
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## Ch 4(d) Paul's Letter to the Corinthians and "Thou shalt not commit adultery"

1. **Paul's letter of 1 Corinthians** is discussed in *Is Christian Morality Unique Part 1*. This recalls there were affluent Corinthians in Corinth who looked down on Paul because he supported himself as a tent-maker. These people were reverting back to an attitude in Greek Philosophy that had contempt for manual work. But Paul tells them they are immature. He says he embraces poverty and hardship in order to adopt and live out the mindset of Christ (1 Cor 2:17-25).

- What do you think would be some likely examples of Corinthian immaturity?

2. Ch 4 of *Is Christian Morality Unique Part 1* describes how Paul develops points about:

Respect for one's own body?

Respect for the communal body?

Respect for the development of a "spiritual body"?

- What would you think such points would be? (Common sense is a lead-in here).

3. Paul tries to deter the Corinthians from using Prostitutes. He says "*to fornicate is to sin against your own body. Your body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit*" (1 Cor.6:19).

- What would be his underlying logic here?

4. Paul upbraids wealthy Corinthians who bring their own food to a community meal and then eat it amongst themselves, not sharing it with poorer people. He says "*Shall I commend you in this? No I will not*" (1 Cor 11:22). "*Do you not have homes to eat in?*" (1 Cor:11:34).

- What would be some underlying reasons for Paul to be making this point?

5. Throughout his life after his conversion, Paul is always mindful of the vision he had and the voice he heard "*Saul, Saul why do you persecute me? Who are you Lord? I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting.*" (Acts 9:4-5).

- If the resurrected Jesus claimed there was a bond between himself and his followers, do you think this implies there is a bond between his Followers as well.
- Would such a bond in itself require the Followers to respect each other?

6. Paul talks about the followers of Jesus forming a "corporate body" "*You are the body of Christ; but each of you is a different part.*" (1 Cor 12:27) He points out people's gifts and roles complement each other and they should respect such difference.

- Would you see this approach being carried over into modern corporate bodies?
- What about in society as a whole e.g. in politics?
- Would you see Paul developing the commandment "*Thou shalt not commit adultery*" into a challenge to respect the social needs and social stability of other people?

7a

**IS**

**GODLINESS**

**IN**

**OR**

**OF**

**US ?**

**Paul says "Only the Spirit of God can know God."**

**Therefore  
GOD'S SPIRIT DWELLS**

**IN**

**US**

## Ch. 5(a) Paul confronts Greek Philosophy

Paul says he is preaching a crucified Christ.

*“This is an obstacle to Jews and to the Greeks it is madness”* (cf. 1 Cor 2:23).

1 Paul differentiates between the spirit that occurs naturally within a person and the Divine Spirit of God. He says:

*...the depths of a man can only be known by his own spirit, not by any other man, and in the same way the depths of God can only be known by the Spirit of God* (1 Cor 2:11).

- How would this contradict Stoic teaching about “a divine spark” in the human essence?
- How does it tie in with Jewish teaching e.g. *“I will put my Spirit within you.”*? (Ezk.36:37)
- The first Chapter of Genesis about the creation underlines the otherness of God.  
Comments?
- The “otherness” of God is basic to Judaism. Would it therefore be basic to an understanding that the commandments come from an “outside” authority?

2 Chapter Five in *Is Christian Morality Unique Part 1* describes further, the Stoic idea that each person has within their own “essence” a “divine spark” (independently of God). This lives on after death.

- Could it be understood from this that people share in the very nature of God (or gods)?
- Would this imply that people’s “gifts” are their own, independently of something given to them?
- What would be some of the other implications of this idea?

3. Paul implies the Stoic idea about the “divine spark” also exists amongst some of the Corinthians. For such people spiritual “essence” is what counts. Material things are of less importance. Paul shows how this is carried over into attitudes towards sex

*There is immorality among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans; for a man is living with his father’s wife. And you are arrogant!* . (1 Cor 5:1-2).

- Would you say this example reflects the idea that material things are of less importance?
- What are further pitfalls for people who think their real “essence” is their spirit and they are “free” from bodily responsibility and concerns?
- Could you see some of these pitfalls being reflected in the present time?
- What about the philosophy behind the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War?

5. Apparently some Corinthians took an opposite approach to bodily indulgence. They thought they could force the whole community to abstain from marriage and lead a celibate life. This would give priority to the spirit. In response to their question about this Paul at first appears to agree with them. He says *“It is well for a man not to touch a woman”* (1 Cor. 7:1). He also sets out a “hierarchy” for marriage and puts abstention from sex at the top of it. (1 Cor. 7:8-10. But at the same time, he also insists that abstention from sex is a “gift” from God. It must not to be forced upon people (1 Cor. 7:7).

- Any comments?

**PAUL**

**as a Jew he stressed the**

**OTHERNESS**

**OF GOD**

**As a follower of Jesus**

**he urged that we develop the MINDSET**

**of Jesus**

**by focus on the needs of the**

**OTHER**

## Ch 5(b) A General Look at Paul

Genesis, the first book of the Bible, gives a poetic description of how God made the world. Actually there is an eerie connection here with the “Big Bang Theory”. This is about an initial explosion of light. In Genesis the first thing created was light.

If we look at Genesis Chapter One, the book immediately makes two key points about God and these are repeated throughout the first Chapter cf. “*God said “Let there be light’, and there was light. God saw that light was good.....”* (Gen. 1;3)

- What in your opinion, would these two key points be?
- Would you agree that the two points could be described as saying that firstly God is the ultimate authority in charge of creation and secondly that creation is good?
- Would you agree that Genesis claims that finally, it is God who is in control?
- How do the opening verses of Genesis tie in with the First Commandment “*Thou shalt not have strange Gods before me*”?
- The Stoics had the idea that the essence of oneself lives on beyond death. Do you think this could lead to contempt of material things including one’s body?
- Paul said that only the Spirit of God can know God (cf. 1 Cor 2:10-16). Any comments?
- What is the difference between “*a gift received not an essence released*” ?
- Paul quotes some of the Corinthians “*Let us eat and drink today. Tomorrow we shall be dead.*” (1 Cor 15:32). Why does this conflict with his own teaching?
- Towards the end of 1 Corinthians Paul says “*keep on working at the Lord’s work, knowing that, in the Lord, you cannot be laboring in vain.*” (1 Cor 15:58) How would you see this as tying in with his teaching about morality?
- What sort of living identifies people with Christ?
- What was “new” about the cosmic and morality map of Paul that he was developing from Genesis 1 and from Judaism?

Part 2 of *Is Christian Morality Unique?: Time and Place World Views in Tension* provides a gospel analysis. It shows how Matthew warns against the extremes of Judaism (over-stress on law) and Luke warns against the extremes of Hellenism (over-stress on idealism).

- Do you think that in Paul’s letter to the Galatians he is warning against over-stress on legalism?
- Do you think in his letter of 1 Corinthians he is warning against over-stress on idealism?
- At least Judaism itself is less likely to over-stress abstract idealism. At least the Hellenism of pagans was/is less likely to over-stress moral legalism. Any comments?

9a

**MONEY**

**POWER**

**SEX**



**Bin ?**



**Jesus said**  
**"Go sell what you have and**  
**give to the poor and**  
**you will have treasure in heaven and**

*Come Follow Me"*



## Continuing the Morality “Map” of Paul into the Gospels

### Ch 6(a) Mark “Come Follow Me” (Mark 10) cf. money, power and relationship

In Mark’s gospel Chapter Ten (10: 17-22) a man comes forward and asks Jesus how he can inherit eternal life. Jesus answers “*Do not kill. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal.*” He also makes reference to two other commandments “*Do not bring false witness. Honour your father and your mother.*”

The man says he has observed these commandments from his youth. He is apparently looking for something more. Jesus replies. “*Go sell what you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven. And coming, follow me.*” (Mk 10:21) The man was quite wealthy. He could not meet the challenge and he went away sad.

Consider this challenge in terms of the three key social commandments relating to money, power and sex. The man was not only challenged to avoid stealing but to give his possessions to others. This is a reversal of “*Thou shalt not steal*”. Also, by giving away his possessions he would be less able to marry and set up and run a household. In this sense the challenge is a reversal of “*Thou shalt not commit adultery.*” Also, in his following of Jesus, the man would be devoting himself to the self-determination of others, the opposite of acting with violence towards them cf. “*Thou shalt not kill*” .

The basic challenge here is to reverse the negativity of the commandments into a positive. Instead of avoiding the taking of possessions, social supports and life of other people the man is challenged to devote himself to their protection and enhancement.

- Would you agree with this interpretation?

Within the text of Mark’s gospel this challenge is preceded by Jesus putting forward a child and saying “*Unless you welcome the kingdom of God like a little child you shall not enter into it.*” Mk 10:15.

- Do you think this structuring of the text (and apparently the real-life occasion) was deliberate and if so why?
- Do you think this statement presents the child as a model for the kingdom of God”? Why would that be so?
- Do you think that Mark the first gospel writer (70 CE), was introducing a dimension of Jesus himself, as that of “a child”?
- Do you think (unwittingly or not) that Christmas is a celebration of this dimension?

**A FOCUS ON THE**

**SPIRIT**

**OF THE MORAL LAW**

**Internalise the Law**

## Ch 6(b)                      The Gospel of Matthew

### (i)      **Jesus talks about observance of the moral law**      (Mt. 5:17-20)

There are apparently harsh words from Jesus in these verses:

*“Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete them. I tell you solemnly, till heaven and earth disappear, not one dot, not one little stroke, shall disappear from the Law until its purpose is achieved. Therefore the man who infringes even one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be considered the least in the kingdom of heaven; but the man who keeps them and teaches them will be considered great in the kingdom of heaven.”* (Mt.5:17-19)

Jesus goes on to refer to the commandment **“You must not kill”** (v.21). He goes further than the words of the Commandment and even condemns those who are angry with their brother or calls them a fool or renegade (v22). He requires reconciliation with one’s brother and others before making an offering to God (vv23-4).

Jesus refers to the commandment **“You must not commit adultery.”** (v.27) He goes further than this and condemns those who look at a woman lustfully. He says *“They have already committed adultery with her in their heart.”*(v.28).

Further in this context he alludes to **stealing** and again he goes further than the Commandment. . He says *“If a man takes you to law and would have your tunic, let him have your cloak as well* (v.40) *Give to him who begs from you, and do not refuse him who would borrow from you.* (v.42).

- Do you think this stress on the detail of the commandments is mainly about attitude?
- Do you think a stress on the spirit of the commandments would enable people to be more independent of a whole regulation framework set up around them?.
- In industrial law today, there is an emphasis on self-regulation. What are advantages of this?
- Can you think of examples of self-regulation?

Matthew’s gospel was written from within a community of Jewish Christians around 85 CE. They believed they were bringing the Jewish law to fulfillment because of their emphasis on the spirit of the Law rather than the letter of it. But mainstream Jews were now following the leadership of the Pharisees who were “sticklers” for the law. The Pharisees were now basing Judaism upon the local Synagogue rather than Jerusalem, where the Temple had been destroyed.

- Do you think that Matthew, in recounting these words of Jesus, is trying to show that Jesus (and Jewish Christians) have not rejected the Commandments. Rather they are trying to “raise the bar” of their observance?

11a

**Develop**

**NETWORKS**

>

**OF**

**PEOPLE**



**(ii) Jesus sets out a base for mission in the Fishing Industry**  
(Mt. 10:5-15)

In Chapter 21 of John's Gospel, which is the last Chapter of the gospels, there is a story about the disciples of Jesus who had been out fishing all night. They included Simon Peter, Thomas and Nathanael. There were also James and John and two more of his disciples. The unnamed disciples could have been Andrew, brother of Simon Peter and also Philip. The point being made here, is that more than half the inner circle of Jesus were connected to the fishing industry. There were also further social connections between disciples. Simon Peter and Andrew were brothers and came from the same town of Bethsaida as Philip. He in turn had a long-term connection with Nathanael. James and John were brothers and their father Zebedee employed other fishermen.

The significance of this commonality amongst the disciples of Jesus is that when Jesus started out in his mission there were already strong, long-term connections between the people around him. They in turn belonged to wider networks of people in the fishing industry. The networks included fishing families, hired labourers, suppliers of raw goods, fish processors, shippers, carters, tax collectors, toll collectors etc. These networks would have been mainly consisted of Jews who did not eat with or visit the homes of Gentiles.

The networks operated on an economic as well as a family base. In fact the industry was regulated by the Roman Empire with its systems of regulation and taxes. These taxes were heavy and the people shared grievances about this. They also had grievances with their religion of Judaism. As Peter told a Council of Jerusalem later on, neither he, nor those present at the Council, nor their ancestors, had managed to observe all the rules and regulations connected with Judaism (Acts 15:10). According to historians such as Martin Hengel, the Jews of the first century CE generally remained loyal to their Jewish faith even in the face of the 'bulldozer' impact of the Greco-Roman Empire upon Palestine. But texts such as Mt 10:5-15 and Acts 15:10 pick up on the difficulties Jewish people had, trying to live out the minute regulations of their faith in the midst of cultural, social, economic and political pressures.

When Jesus sent out his disciples he told them not to go to pagans or Samaritan towns, but rather "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Mt 10:6) This direction may have appeared to have "narrowed down" the outreach of Jesus. But it also showed that he had a specific kind of outreach in mind. The disciples were to go to people they already knew who were of the same socio-economic base, who shared the same industry and who had similar difficulties with the practice of their faith.

- Do you think Jesus was setting up a social framework which, of its nature had the potential to deal with social injustice and inequality?
- In pages above it was noted that Paul wanted to introduce a new, more humane type of society. Do you think the approach of Jesus, in basing his mission on a specific industry ties in with this?
- Have you any clues as to why Jesus would be basing his original outreach on and from, an industry such as the fishing industry?
- Do you think Jesus intended to offer people a simpler yet deeper approach to their faith?

**GOD**  
**AND**  
**Morality**

**Applies to All**



**Ch 6(c)****The Gospel of Luke****(i) Jesus Moves on from his HomeTown (Lk 4:16-30)**

Luke, in contrast to Matthew, was writing from and for a community of people that mainly consisted of Gentile (non-Jewish) converts. His gospel reflects the background, interests and needs of Gentile Christian people spread throughout the Roman Empire. These people were more affluent than for example Mark's auditor/readers. Also they were familiar with Greek philosophy. At the start of both his gospel and "Acts" Luke addresses them in a corporate way, with the Greek name of Theophilus.

Early in Luke's gospel (Ch. 4) Luke tells the story of how Jesus returned to his home town of Nazareth and attended the weekly service at the Synagogue. He was invited to do a reading of Scripture and then talk about it. He picked the passage about the prophet Elijah who went to a widow in the middle of a famine (1 Kings 17:7-15). She prepared for Elijah what she thought would be the last meal for herself and her son. However, it turned out her container continued to hold food for her.

At first the Nazarenes thought that Jesus was referring to themselves as being downtrodden. But then he pointed out that this widow was not connected to Judaism at all. He said God sent the prophet to a person who was not a Jew because it was God's intention to reach out to all peoples. This interpretation of the text made the Nazarenes so angry they rushed Jesus out of the town to a nearby cliff intending to throw him over it. But he slipped through the crowd and went away.

- If, as Jesus said, it is God's intention to reach out to all peoples one can also assume that his Commandments of "thou shalt not kill, commit adultery or steal" are also meant to apply to all people. Any comments?
- Could you list some of the results in a society where these three commandments are not observed?
- What do you understand of the "slippery slope"?
- Can you think of a society where there was institutionalized killing and reflect on what happened to it in the long term?
- Do you think people should completely "give up" their right to self-determination?
- Do you think people can de-sensitise their ability to form relationships with others if they think adultery is OK?
- What are some of the ways people can become "lax" with regard to institutionalized stealing? The Banking Royal Commission threw up some examples of this.
- Do you think a catch phrase that "good ethics in business makes for prosperous business" is actually true?

"THOU SHALT  
NOT KILL"

cf.



"THOU SHALT  
NOT COMMIT  
ADULTERY"

cf.



"THOU SHALT  
NOT STEAL"

cf.



---

AND



TO GIVE UP

POWER ? / RELATIONSHIP ? / MONEY ?

## Ch 6 (ii) Luke continues with Paul's Morality Map

In the text of Luke's gospel there is a continuation of Paul's focus on the three key commandments of "Thou shalt not kill, commit adultery or steal". These commandments may have differing labels but they imply the same things. For instance:

1. In Luke's opening description of the life of Jesus, he recounts how Jesus fasted and prayed in the desert for 40 days in preparation for his mission. At the end of this time he was obviously hungry. He was then tempted to turn stones into bread, He was also tempted to throw himself from the pinnacle of the Temple to show that God would save him. He was also tempted to worship the devil to obtain worldly power. Actually, these three temptations link in with over-reliance on material benefits (cf. money), over-reliance on social supports (cf. sex), over-reliance on worldly powers (cf. power).

- What do you think of this interpretation?

2. The gospel of Luke has an underlying theme of Jesus making his way towards Jerusalem. This shows the need for people who rely on rationalism, to also have a sense of direction. True?

In Chapter Nine, Luke shows how Jesus invited some people to come and follow him. But they were inhibited from doing this because of over-attachment to money, power and/or sex.

a In Lk 9:58 a man offers to follow Jesus. But Jesus warns him "*foxes have holds and the birds of the air have nests but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.*"

- Do you think this implies that in a following of Jesus (and his own observance of the Commandments), one needs to be detached from material comforts and **money**?

b. In Lk 9:59-60 another person said "*Let me go and bury my father first,*" (that is, wait until his father dies). Jesus answered "*Leave the dead to bury their dead; your duty is to go and spread the news of the kingdom of God.*" (Lk 9:59-60).

- Do you think in a following of Jesus (and his mindset) one needs to have at least some detachment from one's own self-determination, career and the **will to power**?

c. A third man said "*I will follow you sir, but first let me go and say good-bye to my people at home.*" Jesus said "*Once the hand is laid on the plough, no one who looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.*" (Lk 9:61-2)

- Do you think that at times, a following of Jesus and his own observance of the Commandments requires detachment from the comforts of family living and **sex**
- Consider the situation of soldiers who have gone (and still go) to fight for their country. Do you think in general, they demonstrate detachment from material goods (cf. money), self-determination (cf. power) and the comforts of family living (cf. sex) ?
- To what extent does a readiness for "self-sacrifice" sum up this approach?

THE WAY

and

"Raising the Bar"

*of the commandments*

## A Church Council sets out a Formula for Christian Morality

### Ch.7

### Acts 15:1-35

(page 1 of 3)

In Luke's Gospel there is an underlying theme of Jesus making his way towards Jerusalem. In Luke's second book known as "The Acts of the Apostles", there is an underlying theme of the Apostle Paul making his way towards Rome, the centre of the known world.

The latter theme about Paul becomes more obvious after Acts Ch. 15. This is because from this point on in the story, Paul emerges as the main character in the book. In Chapter 15 there is an account of a Church Council in Jerusalem (in the mid 50's CE). Here, a "formula" for Christian morality is clarified and adopted as an edict of the Church. The edict enables Paul to progress his mission to the Gentiles (i.e. non-Jews) because now he has a "formula" for morality.

The Jerusalem Council was called in the first place because some of the Followers of Jesus who came from the Pharisee sect wanted all converts to this movement to undergo circumcision and observe the details of Jewish law. In this way the Followers of Jesus would be a "sect" (along with other sects) within Judaism. Some people were already thinking on these lines when they called Paul "*a ringleader of the Nazarene sect.*" (Acts 24:5) Paul rejected this description. He said that rather, he was a follower of "the Way" (Acts 24:14) People had trouble understanding this. In another part of Acts Luke recalls how *About that time there arose no small stir concerning the Way.* (Acts 19:23) Arguably the Council clarified what the Way was.

At the Council Paul asked that if circumcision etc was required of new converts then what was the point of the resurrection of Jesus? Also, Peter stood up and observed that neither he, nor those present, nor their ancestors, had managed to observe all the regulations of Judaism. So why impose these on newcomers? At the time of this Council, the apparent leader of the emerging church was a person called James, possibly James son of Alphaeus, who was an apostle and relative of Jesus. In Luke's narrative of the Council, James quotes the prophet Amos who had lived centuries beforehand. Amos had railed against unjust trading practices. He condemned the wealthy who would "*buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and sell the scrapings of the wheat*" (Amos 8:6).

One may wonder what relevance Amos had to a debate about circumcision. However the reference shows that as far as James was concerned it was not enough for the Followers of Jesus, whether they be of Jewish or Gentile origin, to only observe the letter of the Commandment "*Thou shalt not steal.*" Rather, they should also observe its spirit e.g. in terms of avoiding unjust trading.. Thus Amos, and James who was quoting him, were "raising the bar" of law observance.

- Would you consider this a fair interpretation as to why reference was made to Amos in the debate about circumcision at the Council (Acts 15)?

<p><b>"THOU SHALT NOT KILL"</b></p>	<p><b>cf.</b></p>	<p><b>BLOOD</b></p>
<p><b>"THOU SHALT NOT COMMIT ADULTERY"</b></p>	<p><b>cf.</b></p>	<p><b>FORNICATION</b></p>
<p><b>"THOU SHALT NOT STEAL"</b></p>	<p><b>cf.</b></p>	<p><b>STRANGLING</b></p>

## A Formula for Morality

### Ch.7

### Acts 15:1-35

(page 2 of 3)

According to Luke who narrates the events of the Jerusalem Council (50's CE), James suggested that instead of requiring the circumcision etc of Gentile converts in the emerging Church, these people only need to abstain from "*blood, fornication and strangling.*" (Acts 15:20). Such a "formula" was then adopted as an edict of the Council. There was unanimous agreement to send representatives at the Council, back to the local churches with this edict (cf.15:22).

Actually, the Council requirement about avoiding "*blood, fornication and strangling*" linked in with requirements that were set out in the ancient Book of Leviticus (Lev 17-18) one of the Torah books of Judaism. In Leviticus it was ruled that outsiders wanting to live amongst Jews do need not be circumcised. Rather they had to abstain from blood (17:10-14), fornication (18:1-30) and strangling" (17:13). These rules fitted in with the Jewish prohibition against the strangling of animals. If animals were to be eaten they had to be "bled out" and Jews were not allowed to drink blood. In fact the rule was also a health safeguard. It would deter people from eating animals that had died of natural causes with all the health hazards that goes with that. The law about fornication would deter foreigners from engaging in and promoting pagan temple rites.

To the Pharisee-based, pro-circumcision people who attended the Council, the edict appeared to link in with their own ancient and established custom (so they could hardly contest it).

However according to Paul's letter to the Galatians, it appeared that as far as some Jewish Christians were concerned, newcomers could thereby be part of the community in one sense, but only in one sense. They were still considered to be separate. This was especially obvious in the shared meal of the Eucharist. Here the community was supposed to unite as one body and share in the Eucharistic body of Jesus Christ. (cf. 1 Cor 11:20). Paul confronted the Galatians about Jewish Christians eating apart, '*People in Galatia have you gone mad.*' (Gal. 3:1) He even publicly confronted Peter about this (Gal. 2:14).

So how did Paul understand the Council edict of abstaining from "*blood, fornication and strangling.*" Early commentaries that interpreted this text claimed that it meant more than rules about eating. Rather it had a morality level of meaning.

- Any ideas as to how the edict about "*blood, fornication and strangling*" could have a "morality" level of meaning?
- Essentially, Judaism is about basing one's life on the moral laws of God. Do you think the incorporation of Jews and Gentiles into the "one Body" would make sense if the Gentile newcomers were "only" required to observe dietary rules?
- Recall Paul's vision on the way to Damascus "*Saul, Saul why are you persecuting me?*" "*Who are you Lord?*" "*I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting.*" (Acts 9:4) If Jesus identified with all of his followers in a bodily way, his Jewish and Gentile Followers would need to be united in more ways than how they ate. Any comments?

**BLOOD**

cf.

**AVOID CRUELTY**



**FORNICATION**

cf.

**AVOID  
USING OTHERS**



**STRANGLING**

cf.

**AVOID  
UNJUST BUSINESS  
PRACTICES**



## An Interpretation of “blood, fornication and strangling”

Page 3/3

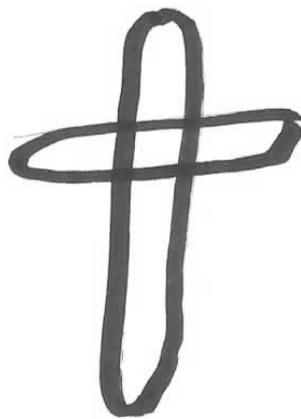
(a) “blood” referred to cruelty as such. In the Roman Empire there was institutionalized cruelty. Major towns had Colosseums in which gladiators (slaves, criminals or opponents of Rome) fought with wild animals or against each other. Implicitly the Jerusalem Council edict bans the Followers of Jesus from attending these popular gatherings. Thus the commandment “*Thou shalt not kill*” was being interpreted as a ban on blood-lust as well, and in fact a ban on all forms of cruelty. Implicitly it urges “*Have compassion towards all sentient beings.*” (Actually this quote comes from the Dalai Lama of Buddhism.)

(b) “fornication” on one level refers to participation in Temple rites for pagan fertility gods. An interpretation of the edict is, that Followers of Jesus were not only being told to avoid these rites. They were also being told to avoid fornication, that is, uncommitted sex, as such.. Thus the commandment “*Thou shalt not commit adultery*” was being extended to unmarried people as well. By implication, there is also criticism here of anyone “using” other people for their own gratification. Rather focus should be put on the social well-being of “the other.”

(c) “strangling” in the context of James’ quote of the prophet Amos was, as already noted, extending the Commandment of “*Thou shalt not steal*” into condemnation of unjust and unfair business practices. Again such an extension was aimed towards the well-being of “the other”.

- Would you agree the above interpretations show that in observing the commandments of “*Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal*” the followers of Jesus were being challenged to orientate themselves towards the needs of “the other”?
- This edict of the Jerusalem Council is mentioned in Acts a number of times. Do you think that Luke the narrator, would have put in so many repetitions of the edict if it was “only” about rules relating to eating requirements as many Scripture commentaries say?
- If the edict of the Council did only relate to eating requirements (cf. Leviticus) do you think this would have solved the debate about circumcision?
- Do you think some of the people at the Council like Paul, would have been happy about a morality interpretation of the edict (and the Commandments) because the edict dropped off so many detailed regulations of Judaism?
- To what extent do you think the edict was about “money, power and sex” and was raising the bar in observing commandments?
- Could you say the edict focussed on the “spirit” of the commandments?
- Historical sources say that gladiatorial fights continued on until the fifth century when Christianity became the State religion of the Roman Empire. Any comments

## *Mark's Passion Narrative*



*Jesus is Stripped of 'Every Thing'*

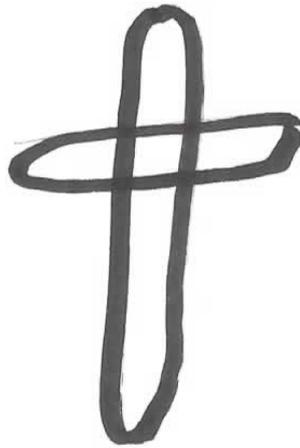
*"There was darkness over the whole  
land"*

cf.





## *Matthew's Passion Narrative*



*Jesus Faces 'Aloneness'*

*"My God, My God, why have you  
deserted me?"*

cf.



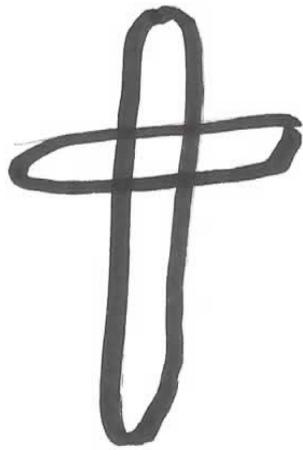
(ii) **The Passion story of Matthew and Aloneness**

Matthew presents his own interpretation of the passion. As with the rest of his Gospel he looks at relationship in particular. He notes “*all the disciples fled*” (Mt 26:56). Matthew’s interest in the social isolation of Jesus is reflected when he describes the jibes that were made when Jesus was on the cross.

*And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, “You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.” So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying “He saved others: he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel: let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God: let God deliver him now, if he desires him, for he said, “I am the Son of God.” (Mt. 27:39-44)*

- Jesus moves into the crucifixion and its aloneness because this is the will of God for him (Mt.29:39) The will of God is primary here. Social supports are secondary.  
Any comments?
- Matthew was writing in about 85 CE, 15 years after the destruction of Jerusalem. At that time Jews were in their own state of crisis. The chief priests and Temple system were gone. The surviving scribes and elders were wondering themselves, whether or not God wanted them to continue on as a people.  
Any irony here on the part of Matthew the writer?
- At the same time in about 85CE, Matthew’s community also had problems of wondering whether or not God wanted them. Around that time there was an edict from Jewish leaders meeting in Jamnia. The edict required a prayer to be said at the local Synagogue that put a curse on Christians. This effectively banned Christians from the Synagogue. Like Jesus, Matthew’s community was now rejected by the “elders” of Judaism and the Jewish mainstream. Do you think Matthew was putting out a challenge to his own community to be like Jesus, and to be prepared to break links with their social supports if the will of God required it?
- Note how both the passers-by and the chief priests etc are reminding Jesus on the cross that he said “*I am the Son of God*” He had defined himself to them in terms of relationship. Do you think this applies to people in general?
- In his passion story Matthew notes “*All the disciples fled.*” (Mt.26:56). Do you think Matthew is showing here how Jesus was prepared to embrace the will of God even at the expense of losing his friends? Can you think of current examples when this happens?
- In Matthew’s narrative, after the death of Jesus, an “unknown” disciple from Arimathea asked Pilate if he could put the body of Jesus into his newly-hewn tomb.  
Is there a lesson here about supporters “coming out of the woodwork” if one is prepared to stand up for what is “right”?
- At the end of Matthew’s gospel the risen Jesus gives a mandate to his disciples to preach to the whole world and “disciple” others (Mt.29:19). Do you think this is putting a priority on relationship, for the continuation of his “kingdom”? Any implications?

## *Luke's Passion Narrative*



*Jesus Faces Powerlessness*

*"And the people stood by watching."*

cf.





# Morality

**cuts across the boundaries  
of  
WORLD RELIGIONS**

**But is the**

# Uniqueness

**of Christian morality found in its**

**SOCIAL STRUCTURES**

**and the impact they have on morality??**

**This question is explored in Part Two of  
*Is Christian Morality Unique?***

