Eschatology and Ethics: Envisioning the Christian Life Without a Bracelet

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Ethics and Evangelicalism

- Four Common Dimensions of Evangelical Ethics
  1. Act (or action) oriented
  2. Command (or rule) governed
  3. Present focused
  4. Personal in scope
Ethics and Evangelicalism

Rules, Actions, and the Moral Landscape

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commanded Actions</th>
<th>Morally Neutral Space</th>
<th>Forbidden Actions</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Obligations</td>
<td></td>
<td>Prohibitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actions we MUST do</td>
<td></td>
<td>Actions we MUST NOT do</td>
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Ethics and Evangelical Hermeneutics

Explicit Text Approach

If there is not a passage of the Bible that either explicitly commands or explicitly forbids a particular action, then that action is morally permissible (i.e., it’s something that is ‘O.K.’ for us to do, if we want to do it).
If there is not a passage of the Bible that either explicitly commands or explicitly forbids a particular action, then I attempt to imagine what Jesus would do if he were in my circumstances (and do the same).
Two Significant Limitations

1. There are some ethical matters about which Scripture offers neither explicit commands or explicit prohibitions.
   - Examples: cloning, embryonic stem cell research, using various forms of technology

2. There are some ethical matters about which Jesus’ life and ministry cannot serve as a moral model.
   - Examples: infertility treatments, methods of child-rearing
Many evangelicals do not always or even typically see a connection between “last things” and our moral life in the here and now.

Evangelicals DO often see a connection between eschatology and personal salvation.

- Jesus is coming soon; therefore, repent!
  - This soteriological urgency ≠ moral urgency.
• Sometimes (though not always) eschatology can become an excuse for a lack of moral urgency.
  - The world is getting worse all the time (morally speaking), and there’s not much we can do about it. BUT Jesus is coming again soon.
  - Reading the signs – like a scientist who observes, but does not interfere with a lab experiment.
Eschatology and Ethics

- II Peter 3:1-14
  - “Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness . . .” (II Peter 3:11)
  - “Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.” (II Peter 3:14)
- The whole point of Peter’s reference to the “last days” is moral.
Eschatology and Ethics (II Peter 3)

- The ethical (or moral) focus of Peter’s eschatology –

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is NOT</th>
<th>Rather, it IS</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Action oriented</td>
<td>Virtue oriented (character)</td>
<td>“holiness and godliness” v. 11 (also II Peter 1:5-7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rule governed</td>
<td>Teleological in nature</td>
<td>“be found . . . without spot or blemish” v. 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present focused</td>
<td>Present-Future directed</td>
<td>“be diligent to be” v. 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal in scope</td>
<td>Communal</td>
<td>“what sort of <strong>people</strong> ought you to be” v. 11</td>
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Eschatology and Ethics: Some Implications

- Taking an eschatological view of ethics will have at least two practical implications.
  1. It will sharpen our sense of moral urgency.
     - I and II Peter: emphasis on urgency and sober-mindedness
  2. It will reframe our thinking about moral issues – especially about matters that we ordinarily presume to be morally neutral.
     - Example: Twittering