

# 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

**Commanded  
Actions**

**Obligations**

**Actions we  
MUST do**

**Morally  
Neutral  
Space**

**Forbidden  
Actions**

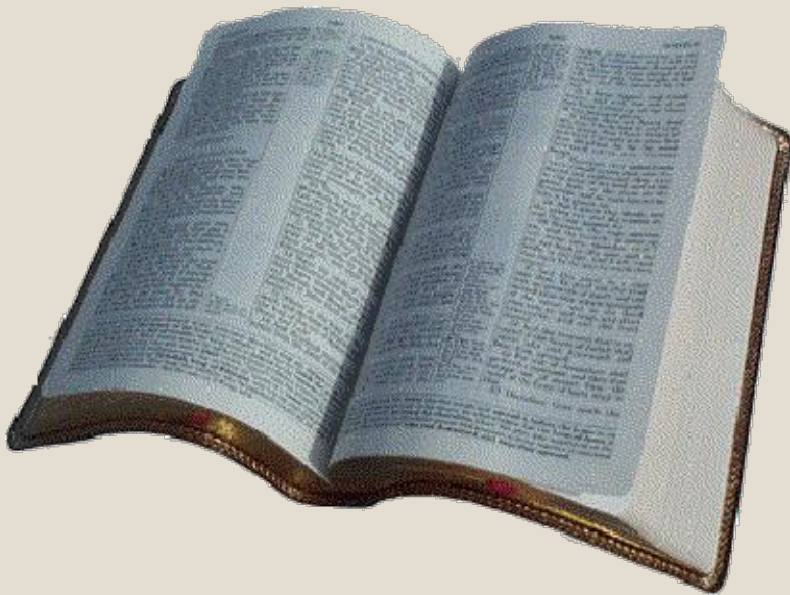
**Prohibitions**

**Actions we  
MUST NOT do**

# 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).

# Ethics and Evangelical Hermeneutics

## Christocentric Imaginative Approach

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).



# Ethics and Evangelical Hermeneutics



- 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

# Eschatology and Evangelicalism



- 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.

# Eschatology and Evangelicalism



- 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 –

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

# 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