PAUL'S THEOLOGY
Lesson 37

Ethics – Part Three

Have you spent much time using a microscope? I remember the first time I had significant exposure to one. It was in eighth grade science class. Our goal was to use the microscope for looking at one-celled organisms, paramecium, and the like. Before we used the microscope, we became acquainted with it.

The microscope had three knob-looking pieces, each with a different magnification. We were taught to call the knobs the "objective lenses" of the microscope, because these were the lenses closest to the object we were viewing, as opposed to the lens in the eyepiece, which was closest to the eye.

Many microscopes are still built with the same lenses today. The objective lenses are the keys to how much magnification one gets from the microscope. If the eyepiece lens is 10X, magnifying the object 10 times, then you multiply that magnification by the objective lens. If you have four knobs, four objective lenses of 4X, 10X, 40X, and 100X, then you choose one of those three and multiply it times the eyepiece lens to get your real increase in magnification. Choosing the 4X knob, for example, gives you magnification of 40 times the unaided view of the object (10X from the eye lens times 4X from the objective lens). If you choose the 100X objective lens, then you get magnification of 4,000 times!

As we were learning to use the microscope, we were also taught that the shorter objective lens was the least powerful and the largest was the most powerful. I remember taking a hair that our science teacher had us cut from our heads and putting it under the microscope using the weakest magnification. The view was incredible! The hair looked like some big piece of pipe that belonged at an industrial site.

I thought, "Wow! If the hair looks so cool under the weakest lens, no telling how cool it looks under the strongest lens!" Without waiting for any instruction from our teacher, I rotated the lenses to the longest one, to the most powerful.

I saw nothing – there was simply fuzzy darkness! Try as I might to focus, the largest lens was simply too powerful to provide any perspective or view of the hair. At the highest magnification, the microscopically small amount of hair under examination was not visible in any useful manner.

When we went to look at slides containing things much smaller than a piece of hair, the opposite was true. At the lowest magnification, there were things hardly

visible at all. We had to use the stronger lenses to see these items in any clear or useful fashion.

I learned that day some rudimentary usage of the microscope, and to my regret, my life has not taken me much further in the use or understanding of a microscope. While learning the use of a microscope, however, I did learn something that I do use routinely in life. I learned the importance of perspective: how closely you examine something makes a difference in how usefully you see it.

There are some matters that make great sense with a close-up examination, while others require greater distance. Think about it with a painting. Some paintings you can see with great precision up close, yet others can only be seen and understood from a greater distance. This is not dissimilar to the ethics we have been studying.

REVIEW OF PARTS ONE AND TWO

We are trying to understand "ethics" from Paul's teachings and perspectives. In the first two installments of this lesson, we first examined the actual words "ethics" and "morals." We uncovered that they come from the Greek ("ethics" from *ethos* εθος) and Latin ("morals" from *mos*), words that mean "habit," "custom," or "manners."

As language developed, these words came to mean the ***good*** aspects of manners or behavior, and in English, we add negative prefixes to the words when we wish to speak of poor manners or habits. Hence, "ethic" becomes "unethical" and "moral" becomes "immoral."

After considering the roots of the language, we discussed the Old Testament behaviors that were consistent with our modern views of ethics (*i.e.*, "love the LORD your God with all you heart and with all your soul and with all your might" – Dt. 6:5). We also considered those instructions of God that seem inconsistent with both our ethic and the ethic Christ taught. An example of this was the instruction from God to Joshua and the Israelites to destroy every man, woman, and child in Ai found in the eighth chapter of Joshua.

We asked some hard questions:

- Did God change? Was the God who said to kill the people of Ai the same God that said to turn the other cheek?

- Is there a difference between right and wrong pre-Calvary and post-Calvary? For example in the Old Testament, people were to keep their oaths (Lev. 19:12) while Jesus taught people not to take an oath (Mt. 5:33-37).

- Do we simply follow God's commands or do some of them differ based on culture? For example in 1 Timothy 2:9, Paul expressed his desire that women should not braid their hair nor wear pearls or costly attire. Is that for us today?

We then set out to offer a consistent view of God and ethics that both reinforces the ethics that seem right from the pages of our Bibles, as well as giving us a better context to understand the passages that seem to contradict each other in what they teach as right and wrong.

We set out the following explanation:

There are moral absolutes that find their source and meaning in the essence of our moral God. These absolutes are real and exist. However, in the fallen world, there is a problem always seeing the moral absolute of God. This is true for two reasons:

1. In practical, daily life in the fallen world, these absolutes can take different forms in different situations and cultures. For example, showing God's love to a neighbor (certainly, a good ethical thing to do) might necessitate different actions than in a different culture. In this sense, we see Paul being a Jew to Jews and a Greek to Greeks.[1]

2. God's pure moral absolutes are not always purely expressible in every circumstance. This means sometimes we must try to find the best in a bad situation. Consider the triage involved in MASH units during times of war. If a doctor has limited time and resources and must choose between treating 5 patients successfully at the cost of one who will likely die from critical wounds, or treat the most critically wounded, but in the time it takes to do it, cost the lives of 5 others, then what decision is "right?" Or, should we ask which decision is the best option of the two unfortunate choices?

We contrasted this to other approaches to ethics. We found that it does not fit into either extreme of ethical systems. We could set out the extremes as those systems that have objective ethics that never vary at all based on a situation or circumstance. An example of this approach might be the necessity of telling the "truth" regardless of whether it would inject anyone to unnecessary danger or cost

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[1] I Cor. 9:20-21 "To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law."

a life.   (We gave the example of a Nazi questioning one who had hidden a Jew during the second World War and whether one's ethic demands an honest answer to that question, even knowing it will likely result in the Jew's death.)

At the other end of the ethical spectrum are those who are relativists, those who believe that right and wrong are always flexible. The relativist view comes in a variety of shapes and sizes, some viewing ethics as properly determined by society, others simply by circumstances. Some relativists see the ends justifying the means, others measure right and wrong by conscience or feeling.

The view we have given does not land in either camp. Some might argue it lands in both, while others might argue it lands nowhere! We have taught that there is an objective and absolute right and wrong, but this objective morality is found in God and his character. He only is good, and he only is our proper definition of what is good.[2]

That places us in the "objective ethics" camp, and yet we do not dwell there. For our understanding of the biblical passages leads us to understand that there are times where the instructions, or at least tacit approval, indicates that the "objective right or wrong" is not always achievable. There are times where the situation demands a "less than perfect" behavior. We saw that, for example, in the stories of Rahab the harlot lying about where the Jewish spies were, thereby saving their lives (Josh. 2) and the Egyptian midwives lying about the birthing of boys to save lives in Exodus 1.

By the same token, the mentioning of those episodes does not place us properly in the "relativist" camp of the ethical spectrum. For while we readily agree that the right and wrong in a situation might be dictated by certain circumstances, it is not because there is no objective right and wrong. Lying is wrong, even if it is to save a life. However, there are times like Exodus 1 where lying was the lesser of two evil choices before the Egyptian midwives.

Our explanation is one that draws its consistency from a strong theology of the fall of humanity. As man fell from Paradise, the fall not only meant ejection from the Garden, but it also meant darkened and depraved people would live out their existence in a world fallen and under a curse. Absent God's infusion into our lives in his Spirit, we are darkened in thought and deed, as are those around us. We live in a spiritual pigsty that has us making muddy choices, try as we might to be clean.

In this muddy existence, the choices often spiral down into the lesser of two evils, as we see in the examples above (Rahab and the Egyptian midwives). There is a clean, objective good, but in the muddy pigsty where we find ourselves

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[2] Mark 10:18 "And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone."

wallowing, we are sometimes unable to achieve it. Jesus pointed this out, as we discussed earlier, when responding to the cross examination of certain Pharisees over the issue of divorce.

The Pharisees asked Jesus whether it was lawful to divorce for "any cause." Rather than interpret the law, which is likely what the Pharisees wanted, Jesus went back in time to creation, long before Moses received the Law. At creation, God's pure will, the pure morality of the situation was clear:

> He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh" (Mt. 19:5).

Jesus then admonishes, "What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate" (Mt. 19:6).

The Pharisees then pointed to the Law of Moses asking, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?" Jesus' explanation shows the way God's pure goodness was modified in the giving of the law as it tried to give governing guidelines to fallen people:

> Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. (Mt. 19:8).

To put this into the language we are using, God has a pure moral and ethic that does not include divorce for man and wife. Yet, God gave Moses and Israel rules and guidelines ("ethics") that included provisions for divorce, because this fallen world is a pigsty and the rules cannot always be applied in a perfectly clean manner. As related to Jewish divorce law, Christ made clear that God was making the best of a bad situation.

To sum up our view of ethics as we consider Paul's teachings on the subject, we have several tools that help us understand apparently contradictory and evolving standards of right and wrong:

1. **God has an unchanging morality or ethic. It is the objective measuring stick for us in matters of right and wrong**. At times we might need to change the magnification lens on our microscope to be certain we are seeing things from God's perspective. This comes into play when we wonder how God could instruct Joshua to kill all men, women, and children in Ai, while the same God in Christ teaches us to look out for the children and to turn the other cheek. From a human perspective, these seem to contradict each other. Yet if we change lenses, we see the consistency:

only God has the role of deciding when and where life ends for people, not man.

2. We can repeat the first part of point one: *God has an unchanging morality or ethic. It is the objective measuring stick for us in matters of right and wrong.* **Yet in our fallen world, the pure right and wrong of God often has less than perfect expression.** There are times where we are left with choices that are the lesser of evils, rather than the pure and perfect will of God. Thus, God's law to Moses allowed divorce in circumstances where his pure will would not have.

3. We again repeat the first part of each point: *God has an unchanging morality or ethic. It is the objective measuring stick for us in matters of right and wrong.* However, God has worked through history to bring his ultimate salvation plan to fruition, and **at times, we see a different expression on God's objective character and morality as history has unfolded**. God had instructions for purity (for example, dietary laws) that he used to prepare people for the purity of Christ and the church. Similarly, God had instructions for sacrifices that were in place to prepare people to better understand the saving work of Christ as a true and necessary sacrifice. After Calvary, those rules and laws serve no purpose. Not because God "changed," but because those purposes of his character's expression have been fulfilled.

PAUL'S TEACHINGS

What does Paul add to this equation, if anything? Do we simply find God using Paul's writings to reinforce this teaching, or do we find further insight from Paul? We would suggest both are at play. We see in Paul a consistency with the viewpoint we are advancing, and we also see Paul adding some greater insight into our ethical model. Let us consider Paul's teaching by asking certain questions:

1. **For Paul, were ethics a simple checklist? Was it simply a matter of following the commands and instructions God gave in Scripture?**

We live in a day much like Paul's where the "religious insight" in questions of right and wrong is often seen to be a checklist of rules taken from the commandments in the Bible (Albeit for Paul's day many used a checklist they derived from the Old Testament portion of the Bible.) As we have discussed in our ethics sessions, however, the Bible has challenging passages that make it difficult for the believer to use it as simply a checklist.

For example, the Old Testament instructed that if an animal with a history of attacking people kills someone, then not only the animal but also the owner must be put to death ("But if the ox has been accustomed to gore in the past, and its

owner has been warned but has not kept it in, and it kills a man or a woman, the ox shall be **stone**d, and its owner also shall be put to death" Ex. 21:29.) Now, our law is full of cases where animals have done this very thing, yet capital punishment has never been assessed against the owner.[3] Similarly, God instructed his people to stone those who spoke with the dead (mediums),[4] those who blasphemed the name of the LORD,[5] and even the "stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother" (Dt. 21:18-21).

So we appropriately ask, what was Paul's source for right and wrong in behavior and ethics? Was it the pure Law, or maybe a modified version of the Law? No, the Law was not Paul's source of Christian right and wrong.

We have already seen in prior lessons that the Law was not Paul's mandate for actions good or bad. On the one hand, Paul certainly used the Old Testament for teaching, reproof, correcting, and training in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16), but Paul also taught that the law was a guardian to bring one to Christ. Further, the law's time as the Christian's guardian was a temporary one (Gal. 3:24).[6] How do we mesh these two concepts? What role does the Law play if it was a temporary guardian that no longer controls once Christ has arrived?

Before we reflect on this, let us first consider an analogy. Among our five children, three have learned to drive. Each of the three took a driver's education course. The course instructor would ride with each one making sure that the rules and lessons learned were followed. Failure of our children to satisfy the instructor would have resulted in the instructor's refusal to certify our children for a license. By following the rules and meeting the instructor's requirements, our children were able to get their licenses.

Once our children got licenses, they were no longer under the instruction of their driver's education teachers. That did not mean that the children were now free to drive 75 M.P.H. in a 35 M.P.H. zone. It similarly did not mean that our children no longer needed to stop at stop signs. The rules of their instructors were still

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[3] Typically, these cases today involved dogs rather than bulls! In a typical case, a dog that has bitten people before gets loose and mauls a young child.

[4] "A man or a woman who is a medium or a necromancer shall surely be put to death. They shall be **stone**d with **stone**s; their blood shall be upon them (Lev. 20:27).

[5] "Whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall **stone** him" (Lev. 24:16).

[6] See the insight on Paul's use of pedagogue (translated "guardian" in the English Standard Version) in lesson 23 on Paul and the Law – Part 2.

important for them to follow. In fact, there were actually more rules once they got their licenses.

We set out our own expectations of our children as they left the tutelage of the Driver's Education instructors. We set out rules of when and where they went and the attitude of their driving ("courteous" and "calm" being two operative words!). We even suggested limited volume on their music while driving.

Our new rules did not invalidate what the children had learned in Driver's Ed. It actually took the lessons to the next step, contemplating new rules of behavior, new motivations, and new levels of concern.

With that analogy[7] in mind, we turn to Paul's understanding of the Law as source of an ethical code. The Law was like a Driver's Ed teacher. It taught rules and behaviors, but its time as teacher and guardian was limited. Once we came to Christ, the Holy Spirit indwells the believer. With the Holy Spirit, we have the indwelling of the Law's author and source. The Law is not "invalidated" but rather placed into its true perspective as something that prepared the believer for Christ. It taught manners; it revealed God's character, at least in some limited historical forms, but it was never the fullness of God for all time. Paul understood and taught that in Christ, "all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" (Col. 1:19).

Hence, Paul saw the Law as useful and a source of instruction, but he understood also its cultural and temporal limitations. An example of this understanding became apparent when Paul confronted Peter for hypocrisy in front of the Galatians churches (see Gal. 2). Peter would eat with Gentiles until certain Jews came to him. Peter then withdrew from the fellowship dining with Gentile believers to keep kosher in spite of the vision God had given Peter about un-kosher foods being clean as recorded in Acts 10.

Paul knew the importance of recognizing the truth of the One who was behind the Law. Paul's prayer was not for the church to learn the particulars of the Law. His prayer was that they learn wisdom and revelation of Christ (Eph. 1:16*ff*).

For Paul, the Law was a good indication of God's character and morality, and yet part of it, at least, was accommodated to the time and culture in which God's character was being expressed. In this sense, Paul understood the importance of some inherent issues of ethical absolutes that pervade culture. He also understood some aspects of God's Old Testament commands that were appropriate to a time

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[7] We should note that analogies serve a limited purpose in an academic endeavor. Any analogy will have areas where its application falls short of the point being analogized. That notwithstanding, analogies are useful for multiple reasons. Analogies help us understand concepts. Breaking apart analogies gives both opportunities to clarify an idea through illustration and to show distinctions between the analogy and the idea through criticisms.

and place rather than an inherent trait of God. For example, Paul limits certain aspects of his behavior as referenced earlier, depending upon whether he was working to bring Jews to Christ or Gentiles to Christ (1 Cor. 9:20-21).

God is the source of ethics for the believer, not a checklist from the Law. Paul told the Ephesians that on matters of ethics, the "truth is in Jesus" (Eph. 4:21). Accordingly, the Christian's behavior and ethics are to be "created after the likeness of God, in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph. 4:24). In this Ephesians 4 passage, Paul sees the imitation of Christ, one that propels and teaches the believer to:

> Put away falsehood…speak the truth with his neighbor…be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, give no opportunity to the devil…no longer steal…share with anyone in need. Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths…Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away…Be kind…tenderhearted, forgiving.

But Paul did not teach these as checklists, they were taught as the imitation of Christ, as following the Spirit. To do otherwise would "grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" (Eph. 4:30). Paul concludes the section by explaining the ethic simply: "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us" (Eph. 5:1-2).

Paul measured right and wrong not simply by going through a checklist, Paul examined the character of God. This examination found its clearest expression in Christ. It allowed Paul to teach the Philippians to "have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5). This is an instruction to do "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable" (Phil. 4:8).

We should pause here and warn the reader that this does not mean that the Christian life now becomes an easy ethical walk. This does not mean that the character and morality of God becomes a simple thing because "the checklist is gone." To the contrary, the believer's life rises far above the checklist! The believer now is to walk in the fruit of the Spirit, in "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23). The Spirit gives guidance, strength and direction. This is contrasted with a walk that gratifies the old unsaved attitudes and desires. These immoral deeds uncharacteristic of God are not mysterious; they are apparent.

> Sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned

you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Gal. 5:19-21).

In conclusion, it is apparent that Paul used the Old Testament as a revelation of God's character and morality, of right and wrong. But, the fullest picture of God's morality and ethic was seen in the life and death of Christ. Moreover, the Christian with the indwelling Spirit, has at work this same power and character of God seeking to renew and transform the believer into likeness of Christ.

We should note here an interesting grammatical construction Paul uses in writing on ethics. Paul uses two Greek constructions called the "imperative" and the "indicative." The "imperative" is not foreign to us for most modern languages, including English, use it. It is the language of command and exhortation. When Paul writes in the imperative he is declaring what ought to be. In Romans 6:11, for example, Paul uses an imperative commanding, "So you must also consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." In 6:13 we read the imperative, "Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness."

Contrast these imperatives in Romans 6 with the "indicatives" Paul uses. The "indicative" is another kind of "mood" used in Greek verbs. Whereas the imperative is an order, the indicative makes a declaration of fact. While the imperative is "what ought to be," the indicative is "what is." We read in Romans 6:17-18, "But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness." This is the indicative mood. Paul makes the simple declaration that the believer is now "a slave of righteousness", is "obedient from the heart."

There is something a bit paradoxical here. Paul writes in one sense commanding ethics (imperatives). Yet in the same passages, Paul writes of ethics as a natural inherent part of whom we are as born again believers in Christ (indicatives). For at least 150 years, scholars have debated what this means and the implications. Rudolph Bultmann does an admirable job of giving the historical scholarship up to his time as he discussed this issue in *The Old and New Man*. Bultmann concludes, "Just as the ethical demands expressed in the imperatives are God's commands for him, so the attitude of obedience which corresponds to the demands is God's gift, given by the Spirit, but in such a way that the demands do not lose their nature as imperatives."[8]

Bultmann finds the clearest expression of this where Paul wrote, "If we live by the Spirit [indicative], let us also walk by the Spirit [imperative]" (Gal. 5:25). (In the interest of full grammar nerd disclosure, we should note that while calling the "let us

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[8] Bultmann, Rudolph, *The Old and New Man* (John Knox Press 1967) at 29-30.

walk by the Spirit" phrase an "imperative," in the Greek it is a "hortatory subjunctive" which functioned as a first person imperative!)[9]

2. **If Paul did not operate with a checklist of rules, then what keys did he give to help determine right and wrong?**

We have already set out Paul's focus on the character of God, the example of Christ, and the role of the Spirit in the believer's life. We have also seen how Paul understood these truths in line with his studies in the Old Testament. We are remiss, however, if we fail to hone in on one key word that Paul used in explaining not only right and wrong, but also in uncovering the proper motivation behind Christian morality. That word is love.

Paul gives "love" as the first fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22). "Love was the one word that gave meaning and structure to the Old Testament law. "For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" (Gal. 5:14). We "fulfill the law of Christ" when we live as Christ did, when we "bear one another's burdens" (Gal. 6:2). Love is what moved Paul to behave with tighter restrictions than would otherwise be called for:

> For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. (1 Cor. 9:19).

In love, Paul found the obligations of the law making sense and finding fulfillment:

> Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. (Ro. 13:8-10).

Consider the way Paul taught husbands to treat their wives, "husbands *love* your wives, *as Christ loved the church* and gave himself up for her" (Eph. 5:25). Of course, we also have Paul's strong teaching in 1 Corinthians 13 that any action, no matter how apparently holy it might be, is nothing.

3. **Does Paul give us any "loopholes" to allow us to sin without a guilty conscience?**

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[9] For further scholarship on this issue consider also Victor Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul* (Westminster John Knox Press 2009) at 224*ff*.

As you work through this lesson, is there a part of you that is looking for a loophole to sin? Is some part of you digging around the edges hoping to justify some dark desire in your life? Is anyone considering how to find a cheap solution for a past sin or a way to see it as less than sin? In an opposite vein, do you read this lesson and feel threatened that others might use it to find loopholes? When you have worked so hard to measure up to a checklist, do you question the wisdom of our suggestion that the checklist is not the answer? These are natural questions, and rightfully deserving of some answers!

First, let us dispel the loophole questions! No, there is no loophole. Paul did not write that the freedom from checklists, the land of love versus law, the walking by the Spirit rather than the written code, was a way to live in sin without any guilt. Paul was emphatic, as we discussed earlier, that the believer should never live in sin. We noted that Paul wrote of morals in both imperatives and indicatives. Paul was giving commands at the same time Paul was telling people that the walk in faith is a walk in ethics. It was the tension that Paul felt and taught. It was the tension that we are not who we were before Christ's salvation and the indwelling Spirit, but neither are we who we want to be or who we will be when the Spirit has finished its work!

Bono, lead singer of the group U2, introduced their song "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For" to a Paris audience as, "a gospel song with a kind of a restless spirit."   He then sang these words:

I have climbed highest mountains
I have run through the fields only to be with you
I have run, I have crawled
…
But I still haven't found what I'm looking for
But I still haven't found what I'm looking for
…
I have spoke with the tongue of angels
I have held the hand of the devil
…
But I still haven't found what I'm looking for
But I still haven't found what I'm looking for

I believe in the Kingdom Come
When all the colors will bleed into one
Bleed into one
But, yes I'm still running

You broke the bonds and you loosed the chains
Carried the cross of my shame

all my shame
You know I believe it
I still do

But I still haven't found what I'm looking for

This modern lyric expressed the tension of Paul in ethics and life. We want it to be what we want it to be. We want it about us and our desires. We want it making sense to us and our life. Yet, the call of ethics in Paul, and indeed in Scripture, is a call to God and his holiness. It is a call to what is right before him. It is a call to his character and morality. It is not about us; it is about him. While we live in the day of victory in Christ, this new age is present now only partially. We still are not there fully. Paul used slightly different lyrics than Bono:

I have suffered the loss of all things
and count them as rubbish
in order that I may gain Christ
...
that I may know him and the power of his resurrection
and may share his sufferings
becoming like him in his death
that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect
but I press on to make it my own
because Christ Jesus has made me his own.
Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own
But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead
I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.
Let those of us who are mature think this way
(Phil. 3:8-15).

This leads naturally to some of the other questions we posed above. Is there a loophole for past sins? Again, no! But, there is something better. There is forgiveness. This is what Bono called "the cross of my shame…all my shame." In Christ, Paul explained, God redeemed us, forgave sin, removed shame, all shame.

POINTS FOR HOME

1. "*Be imitators of God*" (Eph. 5:1).

    Remember the bracelets, "What would Jesus do?" That is a great question to ask when trying to determine right and wrong! Let us never be so haughty as to think that we are then able to do exactly what Jesus would do with the same purity of motive and action, but we can ask the question nonetheless to see the standard that is appropriate for our striving. God is right: God is good. We are to seek to live the life that reflects his goodness as God seeks to "conform us to the image of his Son" (Rom. 8:29).

2. "*Love is the fulfilling of the law*" (Rom. 13:10).

    We see in the incarnation, life, and death of Christ the ultimate showing of love. This is a wonderful direction point on our moral compass. We are living lives oriented to what is best according to our God, for our neighbors, for our loved ones, even for our enemies. This is what we mean by "loving." Paul does not refer to some syrupy feeling of affection or attraction. Paul means a conscious decision to seek what is best for those around us. Paul means a willingness to lay down personal rights for the good of others. This causes us to re-examine how we spend our time, our energy, our emotions, our finances, our opportunities, and everything else. Without love, our deeds are not moral, regardless of how they meet **any** checklist or moral code.

3. "*If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.*" (Gal. 5:25).

    God has won the victory in Christ. The redeemed have been set free from the vicious and mean slavery of sin, but the struggle is still one where we meet the challenges and need to decide to do what we know is right. We live by the Spirit; that is a fact. Yet, we must choose to walk by the Spirit. It is a volitional decision we still make. So, let us take up God's instructions carefully and fulfill his character in the decisions we make, and in the ethics we follow.