

When I was teaching school in a very Dutch Reformed community, the students would ask their pastor to ask me to talk to their youth group. It was no secret that I was going into the ministry and a number of the kids thought I was cool or at least different. On one occasion I was asked to speak to one such youth group on the subject of ethics. Which in teen speak meant they wanted me to talk about sex.

So, I arrived on the appointed Sunday evening and quickly explained to the young folk that there were essentially three forms of ethics: Code ethics, situational ethics and anti-nominalism.

Code ethics are strict behavioral laws you are to live by, such as the 10 commandments. These are often hardened into the shall nots and the musts and should of legalistic folk such as the Pharisees in Jesus day.

Anti-nominalists don't believe in any ethical forms whatsoever. Just do what you want. No rules.

Situational ethics I explained were ethics based upon a principle, which must be applied to each specific situation. This, I told them, was what I believed Jesus taught his disciples and we find it in today's gospel reading from Matthew: *You are to love God with your entire being and you are to love your neighbor as yourself.* The principle Jesus used was love; love of God and love of others. We, as the disciples of Jesus, his followers are then to apply that love principle to every occasion we find ourselves in.

I then went on to say, "but you want me to talk about sex. Particularly pre-marital sex that may well be beckoning to you at this particular point in your lives."

To a code ethicist they would look to the 10 commandments and say, "You shall not commit adultery." Therefore you should not engage in premarital sex. As I mentioned last week, there is a problem with that position as it does not reflect the commandment very well biblically or the society in which it was written. The bible was very lenient on sexual practices. That particular law only set a limit upon marital partners not to break the covenant to remain faithful to each other and/or not to produce a child outside the bond of marriage. Now the legalists in that day could find a loophole in that law as legalists are prone to do. Say a man was passing through a village and spied a lady he fancied and caused a child. All he had to do was slip a ring on her finger saying they were married and then just continue on his way having fulfilled the law; at least and he interpreted it.

But this way of thinking also broke the law situationally. There was no love involved in such an action, just base lust and very little concern for the lady's or child's well-being. So, I reasoned with them, when it comes to pre-marital sex, they had to ask themselves whether the law of love was broken in acts of pre-marital sex. I said I thought it might be possible for couples to have pre-marital sex without breaking that law of love, but on a personal and practical manner I couldn't see how it would work. Most of us had been raised to believe we shouldn't believe in premarital sex and would feel guilty if we did have premarital sex.

I thought I was quite profound in my teaching on this difficult subject for many young and not so young people. To see how well I did as a teaching I then turned to one of my students and asked, “So, Becky, should you have premarital sex with your boyfriend?” She responded, “No!” And so I asked, “Why not?” And she responded, “Because the bible says, ‘Thou shalt not commit adultery.’” Humm, I guess I was not quite the teacher I thought I was.

This all took place in the 60’s –baby boomer times

Influencing me was a book by Joseph Fletcher *Situational Ethics*. Single guiding principle, but it was mainly secular love for each other and also materialistic.

Self absorbed times not limited to the 60’s, you have the me generation, ...and the selfie generation (Last thurs national selfie day)

Our times are more and more materialistic and secular. We need the guiding principle of JC – Love God and each other.

The context of the story is where the Pharisees are trying to lay a trap for Jesus. Got a lawyer to test him.

Big on expanding the law...

Also big on reducing – Hillel – tell while standing on one leg – *What thou hatest about yourself do not to your neighbor.*

Asked to summarize the law Jesus takes Deut. 6.4 Love God with your total being and Lev 19.18 love your neighbor as yourself.

The neighbor in the time of Leviticus and and Jesus’ time mean a fellow Jew. Jesus expands that to the gentiles (good Samaritan story in Luke connected to this)

Love can get lost in ritual. Following the laws, even the 10 commandments can lead us away from what Jesus taught simply – to love. To love God, seeing what is greater than ourselves and being appreciative of that, and to love each other with empathy and compassion.

Augustine said like this, “Love God and do what you like.” The idea is to get caught up in the love of God. Being caught up in God’s love we naturally turn to love our neighbors.

That is the principle, the love ethic, we must try to follow in life to be the disciples of Jesus.

A simple way of getting at this principle of life is found quite well state in the modern phrase, “What would Jesus do.”

Asking that question on a regular basis is a very good way of implementing the love commandment.

If someone cuts in front of you in line or highway; WWJD

If someone encourages you to play a little loose with the tax code or speed limit: WWJD

If you are tempted to stray from your marriage or relationship commitment: WWJD

If you think this sermon should end: WWJD

Okay, that’s it.