



NEW WINESKINS

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A Declaration of Ethical Imperatives

“Jesus said, ‘If anyone loves me he will obey my commands.’”

John 14:23

1. Genuine Christian faith is more than mere assent to propositions of truth. Saving faith issues forth in an ethical life: a life of love, obedience, and holiness.
2. Christian ethics are grounded in the character of God the Father. Neither an abstract formulation nor an arbitrary rule of conduct, our ethical standard is nothing less than likeness to the holy God whom we love and serve.
3. As Jesus is the Divine Exemplar, “the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being” (Hebrews 1:3), His life of love and self-sacrifice becomes the pattern for our own. The follower of Christ is called to conform to the character of Christ.
4. As the Holy Spirit is the Divine Counselor, sent by the Son from the Father to convict of sin (John 16:8-11) and to guide into truth (John 16:13-15), His presence empowers us for transformed living. It is the work of the Spirit to transform us into the character of Christ.
5. We confess that we are incapable of meriting the love of God through any effort of our own. Right standing before God is His gift apart from any holiness, love, or obedience which may be present in our lives. The ethical life is the fruit of, not the basis of, our reconciliation with God through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross.
6. We likewise confess that we are incapable of producing holiness in ourselves. Holy living is possible only as we cooperate with the transforming work of God’s Spirit within us. The ethical life is God living His life through us by His Spirit.
7. Ethical living involves more than mere avoidance of wrongdoing. We are called not only to shun what is hurtful and wrong but also to seek what is good and right. The moral life is one that vigorously pursues the good.
8. The parameters within which God desires us to live as His children have been lovingly revealed for us in the Scriptures.

9. The Scriptures define the good we are called to pursue. Prescriptive ethical standards for Christian conduct, grounded in the covenant with Moses (Exodus 20:1-17), were summarized positively by Jesus in the Great Commandments:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ Here is the first and greatest commandment. The second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” Matthew 22:37-38

10. The Scriptures also define the sin we are called to avoid. Proscriptive guidelines for Christian conduct, grounded in the covenant with Noah (Genesis 9:1-17), were summarized negatively by the Jerusalem council in its guidance to the Gentile church:

“It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything but the following requirements: You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality.” Acts 15:28-29

These categories of prohibitions suggest useful boundaries for Christian behavior in all times and circumstances. In order to honor God, we encourage one another to avoid the following:

Idolatry: Love of God requires that the Lord alone be adored and worshipped. The Lord our God is our ultimate source of joy and contentment. We reject the worship of anything other than God, including: work; wealth; health; success; progress; family; race; nation; political ideologies; economic systems; religious institutions and structures. We reject the practice of tolerance that refuses to discriminate between good and evil and of embracing sin in the name of diversity. We reject those forms of pluralism and syncretism that misrepresent God as revealed in Scripture.

Sexual Immorality: Love of neighbor requires that the sanctity of marriage be honored. The Lord our God is the source of our sexuality, which is to be cherished and expressed in the covenant of marriage between one man and one woman; all other sexual interaction falls outside of this biblical norm. We reject such practices as premarital and extramarital sexual intercourse, homosexuality, bisexuality, adultery, polygamy, pornography, sexual objectification, predatory behavior, and abuse.

Bloodshed: Love of neighbor also requires that the sanctity of life be honored. The Lord is the author and giver of life. We affirm all human life to be sacred to God. We therefore, reject all practices in which life is diminished, demeaned, or indiscriminately destroyed. Abortion, euthanasia, infanticide, domestic violence, oppression, acts of revenge, and unjust wars are symptoms of an ethos of death that repudiates God’s culture of life. So too are destructive speech, unforgiveness, treating people as objects, and all unjust partiality against persons based on race, religion, ethnicity, gender, or social class.

We confess these behaviors to be sin and urge our brothers and sisters in Christ to flee from these and other forms of disobedience.

11. Embracing the power of God's love to overcome sin's mastery and to heal sin's wounds, we affirm a grace-filled, redemptive approach to discipline and restoration, one that leads to repentance, forgiveness, and wholeness in Christ for those who fall prey to the idolatries and perversions of our age.

12. Honoring God, marriage, and life is a high standard of Christian discipleship, one for which we need and receive grace. While this is the standard for all the people of God, it is a requirement for leadership in the church.

13. While we believe these ethical principles are universally binding, we also recognize that some may hold reservations concerning some particular application or implication of these ethical imperatives that is not directly addressed in the Scriptures. It is expected that such reservations will be dealt with within the bounds of freedom and structures of accountability established by the covenant community.