

formal relationship with the congregation and who have agreed to abide by the code of ethics. (Actually, refusing to agree to abide by the code of ethics may not give someone a free pass.) Ethics are usually thought about in terms of behaviors of specific professional groups.

Morality is a much bigger issue. Morals are usually understood to be something that applies to everyone in a particular society. It doesn't matter what the norm is, nor does it matter what a code of ethics says, stealing is usually thought of as immoral. Morality is usually understood as something that is God-given.

It seems to me that in this country we have reduced morality to the level of norms. If someone is caught in adultery, the reaction is more akin to them not shaking hands when a hand was offered. The justification offered is that everyone has to answer for their own life and we shouldn't judge. I agree about our not judging a person, however, we do have to judge an action.

Once morals are reduced to the level of norms, almost anything can be justified. There are those who would do that in our world.

I believe there are certain things that are moral issues. You shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not covet (want to make something that belongs to someone else your own). I further believe that the church has declined in its influence because we have shut our eyes to moral issues.

Moral and ethical issues overlap. Since ethics is about an agreed on set of behaviors, then if one acts unethically, by definition, one is immoral because that person's lied or was untruthful about obeying the ethics. At the same time, one may be perfectly ethical but immoral in that they act immorally about things that are not related to the ethics.

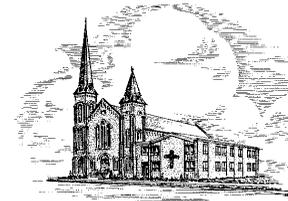
Not every moral issue is as clear-cut as it sounds. It is also a mistake to think that moral issues can be expressed in laws. Laws are agreements people make to live together, along with consequences for not obeying. Something can be legal, but immoral, and something can be moral but illegal.

As Christians, I think we have an obligation to weigh the morality of situations. We may not always agree with one another, but we, as individuals, must live by what we have decided is moral. If you believe adultery and lying to be immoral, then you are bound to not lie or commit adultery. You also have to decide what it means if someone else does lie or commit adultery.

How will you respond to, not necessarily to the person, but to the act?

Peace and Grace,

Pastor Ross



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Greetings,

There are three terms used regularly which are often misunderstood: normative, ethical, and moral. As I look at our society today, I fear that much of the meaning behind the terms has been forgotten. Forgetting, and confusing, the three can lead to the downfall of a church, a state, or nation.

Norms are, usually unwritten, rules for a society. When we say that someone is not acting normally, we are saying he or she is violating the norms. An example would be greeting people. In general, when people meet for the first time in the morning, they will say, "Good morning." The "norm" is to respond with the same phrase, "Good morning."

There is no written rule that says one has to say good morning to people. However, if someone doesn't do that, it raises questions in other people's minds about what is going on with them. To violate norms is usually seen as rude.

Another example is conversational space. In our culture, it is normal to maintain about 18 inches between people who are in a non-intimate conversation. If, in everyday casual conversation, someone gets much closer, there is a feeling of discomfort because the person is invading your space. If it is much further than 18 inches, there is a feeling that the person is standoffish. In other cultures, the distance is different.

Ethics are similar to norms, but they are usually logically arrived at and more formal. Ethics refers to rules which groups lay down about what is acceptable and not acceptable in the behavior of people in a certain group (physicians, attorneys, clergy, etc.).

As an example, the Ministers Code of Ethics of the American Baptist Churches says that when a pastor leaves a church, it is unethical to go back and perform weddings, funerals, or other services for that particular congregation. This applies only to people who have been in a

