

Moral Vision in Ephesians: A Catechism for the Church

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Preacher: Marcus Moreira

[0 : 00] I hope that you may live here today feeling that you learned something. And I pray that what I have to share today may bless you somehow.

What I'm going to share with you today, this morning, is three pieces of work I've been working tied together.

So my invitation for you today is to join me in a train of thought. The train of thought that is composed by three parts written in the title today.

That reads, the moral vision of Ephesians and catechism for the church. Obviously, I'm not speaking here only by myself.

There is some people I rely on and who helped me to get where I am today. And hopefully, with your help, I can move forward a little bit in what I've been working.

[1 : 01] So to give the proper honor to who deserve it, I'm building largely on Ian Sprovan's lectures and a group of students' work on a seminar called Ethics of the Old Testament.

For the first part, talking about moral vision. Also, on a teaching of Dr. Joshua Coutts on advanced exegesis class for Ephesians, which I hope I will not do him a disfavor mention of Ephesians here. And largely to work with Reverend Alan Tan in developing a teaching project, a Christian education project for our local church, the Church of Good Shepherd, into which I got to study a little bit of Christian Catholic cases.

Last time I was here with you, I talked a little bit about building blocks. So today, I've worked not much different than last time. So I'm going to take three different building blocks and hope that we have a beautiful wall, at least, by the end of this morning teaching.

The first building block is this of moral vision. Right? So, although it may seem obvious, I do not like to assume that thinking about moral vision is an obvious thing to do.

[2 : 28] Thinking about moral vision passes through largely a big question that teenagers ask themselves, young adults ask themselves, middle-aged adults ask themselves.

And I found out recently that elderly people also think about quite often, that is, what I am to do with my life. That is a very specific question, if you think about it, of a larger question.

The question, what are we to do? What are we to do?

What are we to do? It's a big question. It's a question that we talk about is a moral question. And this kind of questions, what am I to do with my life?

Or the general question, what are we to do in general, is the kind of question that's so important that people have been thinking about it for many, many years. Christians are no different than other people, so we also think about it for many, many years.

[3 : 49] But I'd like to engage first, not specifically with what Christians think about what should we do, but what people in general in history have taught about what are we to do, and how, more importantly, do we answer this question?

What are we to do? In human history, there is largely three approaches to this question. And as I say it, they are mutually excluded.

That is, if you choose one way to seek the answer for the question, what are we to do, you cannot choose a second one whenever it is convenient to you, if you want to be consistent with yourself.

The first one is to look into nature. Looking into nature to find the answer to the question, what are we to do, is found in many traits of human thought.

Epicureans claim that, Stoics claim that, Buddhists and Taoism claim that, and even nature scientificism claim that.

[5 : 07] When I'm talking about nature here, I'm not talking about the smaller concept of nature as the scientific vision of nature. When I'm talking about nature, it's like the embedded reality in which we live, right?

The embedded reality of how the order of the cosmos is about to be. All these lines of thought, like Taoism, Buddhism, Stoicism, to say, and scientific and Western scientificism, see the cosmos, whichever version of the cosmos they have, as the source into which we should look to find the answer to the question, what are we to do?

And if we observe the nature of the cosmos, and we observe it well enough, it will be obvious to us, or at least clear enough to us, what are we supposed to do with that in our lives, in everything in our lives, even to this specific question, what am I to do with my own life?

A second large approach on the question, what are we to do? It's the will. Modern scientists like Hobbes, Machiavelli, Karl Marx, believe that we find what we have to do in the will.

The will here is actually a larger concept as well, but it's basically an inherent reality of the human being. You can define the proper will through the gathering of people, like the democratic theorists talk about.

[6 : 53] What is good? Good is that what the democratic people join the will, decide what is good. Or you can take a more leviathan approach, in which the state, how powerful as it is, establishes what is right and what is wrong, and the will of the state is what is good.

And last but not least, the third approach of how to answer the question, what are we to do? It's found in the transcendent, which is basically to say that we are to find the source to the question, what are we to do?

The source for the answers, not on the cosmos as it is established, and not on ourselves as it is established, but on something else, a transcendent, that is both outside us, and both outside the cosmos.

Monotheist religions, like Christianity and Islamism, claim this kind of view, but also Platonism claims this view. For example, Platon believes that the word of ideas, a transcendent of both reality and humanity, is the source of all good, and we should look for that good, to see what are we to do. But, why did I invite you to this very brief and very, not necessarily very precise, evaluation of the sources for the questions, what are we to do?

[8 : 42] Well, mostly because I find that nowadays, and maybe this is not just nowadays, and has been here for many years, humanity, Christians or not Christians, have a hard time being coherent in their moral decision, or the source of moral decision.

If you look nowadays for how people do things, and at least on how I see it, people claim, at any given time, any one of these three sources, as why they do what they do.

At some time, they would say that, I act like this, or like that, because this is my nature to do so. Or, we should do this, or make this decision, because this is what the law says, which is expression of the will.

Or, at any given point, they may say that there is some transcendent force, or power, or intelligence, that told them to do A, B, or C.

And we Christians are no, necessarily, better than any human, and we are on the danger, ourselves, to be idiosyncratic, in claiming any of this, any of the time, to justify what our moral decisions is.

[10 : 07] Just to clarify something really quick, because I haven't defined it before. By moral decisions, I mean, any decisions we make, trying to establish what we good, what we ought to do, what is our duty, or what is the right thing.

Not just moral, in the sense of what is perfectly good, and perfectly evil. Some visions of morality, would even say that perfectly good, or perfect evil, does not exist.

We ourselves, however, gather in this room, at least, I feel assured to say, most of us gather in this room, claim to be Christians, believing in one living God, creator of heaven and earth, who revealed himself to us through Jesus Christ, his son, and sent us his spirit.

And, as believers in God, we claim to believe in a transcendent force, one who is outside the created world, and outside ourselves, who establish to us what we ought to do.

both in the particular, what I am to do in my life, and in the general, what are we to do in general.

So, this whole thought I wanted to develop to you is to remind us that although there are many options out there, although society around us will push us in any of these three directions at any

given time, we as Christians have the moral duty to remember that we believe in one God, Almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

[12:01] And as so, we have only one source of a moral vision for us. That is, God himself and his revealed will in Jesus Christ and true scriptures.

why is that so important? Well, I hope by the end of the talk we can get to that, why is that so important.

But, thinking about this takes me then to the second part of these three pieces development. That is, the text of Ephesians.

we take a text like Ephesians to be scripture and as scripture we mean that it's part of God's special revelation to us.

And we as Christians believe that through the reading of scriptures and prayer and gathering like this we can know the will of God for us. So, I'd like to read with you some small portions of Ephesians and then join what we have in Ephesians to what we have in thinking about moral vision in general.

[13:21] of course, if I would be follow my professor's teaching Joshua Coutts in how to do that I would and I would love to read all Ephesians with you and go through everything Ephesians has to say to us about moral vision and catechism.

however, we only have 50 minutes not 50 weeks to go through everything that we could and we should in Ephesians but I'd like to invite you to some very short pieces and then comment a little bit on Ephesians itself.

First one is chapter 1 verse 15 to 23 where it reads in the ESV version for this reason because I have heard of your faith in the Lord and your love towards all the saints I do not cease to give thanks for you remember you in my prayers that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ the Father of glory may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him having the eyes of our hearts enlightened that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him in the right hand in the heavenly places far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that's named not only this age but also in the one to come and he put all things under his feet and gave him his head over all things to the church which is his body the fullness of him who feels all in all and then he addressed the listeners as for you you are that in your trespasses and sins in which you once are following the course of this world and verse four but God being rich in mercy because of his great love which he loved us even when we were dead in our trespasses made us alive together with

Christ by grace you are saved and of course chapter four verse one I therefore I praise the Lord urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called with all humility and gentleness with patience bearing with one another in love eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace there is one body and one spirit just as you have called it to one hope that belongs to your call one Lord one faith one baptism and one God and Father of all who is over all and truth all in all but grace is given to each of us according to measure of Christ's gift therefore I say therefore it says when he ascended on high let host the captives and he gave gifts to men and say he ascended what does mean but that he have descended into lower reach of earth and he rather speaking the truth in love we rather speaking the truth in love we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head into

Christ from whom the whole body joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped when each part is working properly makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love this is the word of the Lord thank you for bearing me through the long reading but these passages are really important to what I'd like to bring as reflection for us today Ephesians is a Pauline text which means to say that it at least written in a Pauline fashion and spirit and claims to be Pauline it has a very beautiful vision of the church and of what God has made to us in terms of what kind of moral vision it cast for the church it is amazing text it takes three time frames it talks about the past focusing mostly of what

[18:37] God did in Jesus Christ and through Jesus Christ in us which I read really quickly it then focuses on the present talking about what are we to do facing the reality of what God did to us and in us in Christ and finishes this text presenting for the future interestingly not so much in a very

scatological future like we have in other texts but in the future as we live here as one community of faith from now on is the last part of the text being powered in the power of God it's very interesting however to think about when we talk about moral vision what what what what the faith is saying to us what what the writer is presenting to us because he is meddling a path it's walking through the path that's one of the fascinating paths of

Christianity for me that is the amazing paradox one of the amazing paradox of Christianity in which perfection or holy life if you prefer is both granted to us in Christ and demanded from us is both expected and unattainable if you read the text you notice that he says that we are alive in Christ we are seated in the heavenly places with Christ just as Christ is exalted above all name and our rules we are with him coheres of God and of the kingdom and right after that he comes and say if you steal don't steal anymore if you lie stop lying please have your households in order don't abuse your child don't abuse your slaves is that kind of amazing paradox in which we as

Christians are at the same time expect to be perfect as our heavenly father is perfect but also know that we are sinners and still have to get rid of the old man and be clothed with the new man basically the moral vision of Ephesians as it casts before us follow the following logic God acted with his mighty power in Christ he resurrected Christ from the dead he put Christ as the head above all and then he took us who were dead not and put us resurrected in Christ but he made another very amazing thing in that he not only took those who were close and that by meaning those who already knew

God through the Old Testament covenant and through the law but also those who were far away which to a larger extent are all us here those who not by inheritance are sons of Abraham but by faith are sons of Abraham and he took these two people those who were far and those who were close and announced peace for both and brought them together and the text says that there was a division an enmity a fight between these two groups and Christ himself destroyed this empty in the cross and made these two people one body one community and he took this one community and put out there for the powers and potesties and principalities of the earth as a testimony against them of the wisdom and of the power of

God God this is an amazing vision about what we are as church we as we gather here and our brothers and sisters all over the globe we are testimony against the powers principalities and potesties of the wisdom of God and then he comes the urge because God takes us from dead to life because God has made us one people do two things I urge you live in a way worthy of your calling and do every effort to keep the unity of the church because we have to live a holy and worthy life of our calling because of the so great work of what God did in our lives that's a duty and a gratitude act towards the loving

[24 : 07] God who saved us even when we are dead even when we are enemies but you also have to be working together as one body one spirit one God and Father who is above all and true all and in all because it's only when we are in this unity when only when we are one body that we are this testimony to the whole world to the whole principalities and potesties of the wisdom of God of bringing together two different people and not only two different people but if you take the vision of Ephesians Ephesians of revelations quite clear all people of all language all tribe as one single people as one single body of course Ephesians is a very great book of moral because he does not only talk about these grand things he then goes to the nitty gritty aspects as I mentioned before do not steal talk true with each other be humble with each other have your household in order but

I do not want to go there today on the specifics of what we have in Ephesians but I want to take Ephesians a testimony for us that not only we believe that the source of what we have to do or how we know what we have to do come from a transcendent source that's outside the world and outside ourselves which are God almighty creator of heaven earth but also that what he wants us to do is both knowable and known it's not out there for us to say who will go up and bring it down to us it's not far away for us to say who will go across the sea and bring it to us but it's close to us and the reality that we believe in this

God and the reality that God made known his will to us not only the major aspects of our lives like be one church but the very nitty gritty aspects of what are we to do about our family what are we to you about our friends how do I decide how to take care of my neighborhood or of my garden or how I am to raise my child or how I am to decide which kinds of food should I eat to be very bold in my claim the way we are to live what are we to do is known to us and because of that I understand and I want to propose to you that is our moral duty as people who claim to believe in one God to

dedicate our lives to know what is the will of the one we claim to believe into it it's our moral duty to dedicate our lives to understand better each day to know more each day to grow in knowledge each day which is thankfully enough something that we are in a certain way doing today we are here together exactly for that purpose but

I'd like to invite you to consider that it's not our duty only to know it in a very individual and particular way but it's also our duty to teach it and to pass it forward in a very consistent in a very clear and in a very broad way in the best of our capacities with the help of our God who is the one who equip us and work through us what takes me to the third part of the building blocks catechesis I want to work with the concept of catechesis not in the more structured sense of the term as it came to be as catechism as a sequence of questions and answers developed to teach the base of faith or a core doctrine of the basics of the

Christian faith or but I'd like to talk about catechesis in a broader sense of the term and more specifically to the act of catholicizing someone in the sense of the old term the practice of teaching someone about the truths of faith about the truths of what God wants us to know about what God has revealed through the scriptures and more importantly through Christ I've been engaged for the past couple months in trying to develop a teaching program to say so for our church for English congregation or church and I'm passionate about teaching the scriptures for many years and it's fascinated to me over time two things first is how hard it seems sometimes to get people interested in what the

[30 : 29] Bible has to say inside the church not talking about people outside the church sometimes people inside the church are more interested in what the Bible has to say than people inside the church which is even more fascinating but how hard it is to bring people inside the church to be interested in what the Bible has to it's fascinating as well how hard it is to take something that we sometimes assume is granted as known and make it systematic to present to people. If you think about it, the catechism we have today is basically a major effort through the centuries to do that. That question and answer process, the kind of questions and answers that are there, is exactly a major effort of many men and women of God trying to take what we believe and make it as clear as possible for the generations and generations after and after. And every adaptation since is an effort to do that better and better.

And what I'm doing is trying to join them in these many years of effort and hopefully contribute somehow. But this strikes me as very curious. If God, if we believe that God makes His teaching auspicious that is knowable, if it is not far away for us to ask who is going to go there and bring us to us, why is it sometimes so hard for us to do it, to teach it? Which is what brings me to this whole conversation this morning as I'm recently thinking about this. This is not a finalized talk yet, but there are at least two propositions I'd like to make about why is it hard to make catechism and then two propositions maybe about how maybe we should make an effort to do catechism in the church. First is that it seems to be that most Christians I know lost the faith in the capacity of God's revelation to tell us what are we to do.

We seem, as far as my experience goes, and by then please I'd like to hear your experience, that we feel that Jesus Christ and the Bible are not enough to tell us what are we to do about many of the challenges of the world.

Whether on the grand order level, for example, what are the Bible has to say about euthanasia, gender, and political participation, it seems that we have lost our capacity to trust that God has provided enough for us for life.

[33 : 48] And we then reach forward for other sources. Let me make something clear here. I am a scientist as background.

I have a mechanical engineer degree. I love interdisciplinarity. I love science as a thing itself. I think it's an amazing thing, a gift of God.

I'm not against using human capacity and knowledge for many developments. But I don't think we should ever trust human capacity and knowledge over God's revelation in any given time.

But it seems to me if not the past generations, at least my generation, seems to have lost to a certain degree the confidence that the transcendental is the source where to look for about what are we to do.

And because of that, to a given extent, that's the second thing, we are to we have reached the point in which the teachings of what the Bible say about what are we to do became a second secondary project of the church.

[35 : 24] Most churches I know and I have grown up from a Pentecostal background, then I moved to Evangelical background, now I'm in an Anglican church which is a very sacramental background historically.

And even those who are very, very passionate about teaching the Bible, and I have seen these in the three groups, for nowadays it seems that this confidence is shaken.

I don't know exactly why yet, that might be some more sociological development that's beyond my grip. I'm never suddenly cracked gay, so sociology is something that is too weird for me to be on my mind, to wrap my mind around it, fascinating as it is.

But I'd like to invite you to consider two things that Ephesians present before us. First, that we are to remember what God did in our lives and through our lives and in our lives and in Christ.

And remembering that and the confidence of that we are to seek earnestly, vividly, every day to know what is the will of God for us.

[37 : 01] And I want to make an important note here, given that we are Westerners, in culture at least, if not by origin.

Western world has made a terrible thing in making us too individual, too ourselves, too detached from the other people.

people. The Bible rarely talks directly to individual people, especially in New Testament letters. When I talk we, I talk we as a community. When it's you here, every time you see you in Ephesians, it's you in the plural, referring to the whole group of people.

people. And in my talk here, we, I not mention we as this group here gathered for the Learners Exchange, I want to say together with the writer of Ephesians, we as the whole people of God, the whole people have been restored in God, the whole people who is actually just one body, we have this moral duty to remember what God did.

[38 : 23] And remember that we are one body. And built on this confidence of what God did, we are to live our lives.

That is what the second part of Ephesians is all about, how to live our lives built in this confidence. And talking specifically about teaching, I think we are, we are to teach the generations after us. And if the generations behind us lack this, even the generations behind us as much as we can, about what is the revealed will of God.

There is an image in the Old Testament that I love when God talks about his law for the people, that he says, I haven't took the reference previously, but he says, teach these things, talk about these things, remember these things.

When you stand up, as you lay down, as you walk down the roads, teach this to your kids, and the kids after your kids, and the generations after generations about that.

[39 : 42] It's amazing, my mother, many years ago, made a study about the importance of memory in the Old Testament. I know that other people also have done that, and it's amazing how much God treasures that we remember what he did, because it's very easy to forget.

It's very easy for us to, now, taking Craig's gaze proposition, it's very easy to live as if God didn't matter. It's very easy to decide what are we to do, as if God had never revealed himself in Jesus Christ.

It's very tempting to us to decide what we have to do, whether in the big things in life, the small things in life, as if we were never raised with Jesus Christ, as if we were never sitting in the heavenly places with him, as if we never became one body, as if we are not a testimony to the powers and potesties and principalities of the air, of the wisdom of God.

This is a temptation we face every day. I'll tell you what, I've been working with many faithful Christians of my generation, and it's amazing how sometimes, even those who I have known, who are, if I allow me to use the word, the best among us, the ones who dedicate most of our time studying the Bible and teaching and evangelizing, how lost sometimes we are about what we have to do.

Even those who grew up with a good Bible teaching, even those who have been faithful to the church, even those who dedicate time to prayer. And I am afraid that if my generation, my peers have this challenge, other generations also might have this challenge.

[41 : 30] challenge. I haven't took time to sit with previous generations to ask how it is to them. I only can know a little bit about the generations after me whom I help in the church, the youth, the young adults.

They seem even more lost than my generation is. But consider that. we as people of God, because of what God did, and I know that I'm repeating myself here right now, have this moral duty to teach, to pass on what God has done and what we have to do regarding that.

And I mean that not only on the usual vision of catechism, of the very basics of faith. There is a text in Hebrews 6 that fascinates me.

When the author says that I wanted to talk with you, it actually starts in chapter 5, about important things, about great things, about deep things, but you still need milk, not solid food.

And I cannot give you solid food, because you are still infants in the faith, which also Ephesians taught us we should grow to not be infants anymore. But let's not put again the foundation about everything we already know, the foundations of faith, of the baptisms, of the laying of hands, of forgiveness of sins.

[43 : 11] And it always struck me, because I've been trying to catch up with and leave the milk for many years. And in all the three traditions I have walked through, and even with studying a master's degree, I still have no idea about the doctrine of laying of hands.

And this guy, writing Hebrews, just say, this is just the basics of the basics. basics. And I wonder, have we lost some of the base of the base over the years?

And we should go back many years to catch up and say, okay, let's gather that and take milk, and leave the milk, and actually get solid food.

Finally, just to finalize my thoughts, I'd like to bring forward again and claim with you again, the importance of the unity of the church.

If we are to grow, if we are to be this testimony, we have to have this unity that Ephesians talk about, which is an act of God, not our duty.

[44 : 25] Our duty is only to zeal to and work toward this unity. And my impression is that proper teaching of the scriptures, not in a very loose way, but in a very deep, embedded sense, which I'm talking about, and which I'm seeking for, will be what we need for the joints and parts work together properly.

you may notice in my talk that I did not give you much answers. I pretty much talked about the problem that I see as I say it.

The reason for that is because I don't have an answer to give. I present to you more a problem that I see to which I'm seeking answer.

And my thought today is to put together these three pieces. The idea of moral vision, the text of Ephesians, and the challenge of catechesis in the church, and see how the two of them come together.

And as a last part, I'd like to leave you with a piece of scriptures. So if anything else that I said was helpful or blessed you anyway, I'd like at least this portion to be a word, not mine, but from the scriptures to you.

[46 : 06] And it says on Ephesians chapter 5, chapter 5 verse 8 on. For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.

Walk as children of light, for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true. And try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.

Take no part in the fruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them, for it's shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed to the light, it becomes visible, for anything that it becomes visible is light.

Therefore it says, awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you. Look careful then how you walk, not as unwise, but as wise, making the best use of time because the days are evil.

Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Thank you so much.

[47 : 29] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.