Lecture 2:

A Closer Look:

"Prolegomena" is a term and category in theology which we refer to “preliminary or prefatory remarks.”

Prolegomena is concerned about the “things” we need to think about before we even “do” theology.

In the same way, there are certain things we need to think before we even “do” ethics. In fact, it is critical in Christian ethics if our earnest desire to do what will bring God the most glory in the moment-by-moment decisions we make in view of Him who we represent.

Prolegomena:

We need to consider our “limitations”:

- Presuppositions: Fixed biased that do not change unless extreme duress is applied;
- Pre-understandings: Moldable influences that “come and go.”
- Noetic Effects of Sin: The effects of sin upon the mind.

But does that we mean that this “baggage” blinds our ability to see things as they actually are? Is this true in every other area of your life? How does your method relate to your metaphysics?

What about the role of the Holy Spirit (illumination)?

Review:

Last time we gave a very basic introduction into ethics by exploring what ethics is and what it is concerned about.

We also introduced three major approaches to ethics:
- Virtue Ethics
- Deontological Ethics
- Consequential Ethics

We ended our discussion by considering what issues are involved and how we would handle the heart wrenching English case of the conjoined twins: Mary & Jode.

Prolegomena:

We need to consider what is real (metaphysics):
- Moderate Realism
- Direct Realism
- Representationalism: “Gap” or “Veil of Perception”
- See end of presentation for further discussion:

We need to consider our method of interpretation:
- Common sense: Plain, normal, grammatical, historical, literary method of interpretation.
- Do we have to have “certainty” in order to have accuracy?

Prolegomena Points We need to Consider:

- What perimeters should be in place in order avoid extreme notions, ideas, propositions, and doctrines:
  - Considering my chart, “Pursue a Balanced Theology,” we need to avoid the following extremes:
    - Unnecessary Dogmatism;
    - Unhealthy Doubt;
    - Indifference;
    - Diversion.
Consider the following quote...

“...I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.”  - C. S. Lewis


**A. Explanatory Power**

Christian worldview is able account for the following:

1. Physical beginning of the universe;
2. Empirical design, order, and complexity that is evident in our universe and in our biological systems.
3. The unity and diversity in biological life-forms.
4. The reality of abstract, non-physical realities (e.g., First principles of logic; mathematics);

**Prolegomena:**

What is your ultimate starting point for doing ethics?
- Infinite, personal God?
- The Bible?
- Experience itself
- Intuition
- Empirical evidences?
- Rationalism?
- Mystic experiences?
- Tradition?
- Certain authorities whether personality or ecclesiastical order?
- Yourself?
- Consequences?

**Christian Worldview:**

The Christian worldview possesses many benefits. Among them I would like to summarize three:

A. Christian worldview possesses the greatest explanatory power among its rivals (e.g., Darwinian naturalism; postmodernism).
B. Christian worldview is able to answer the greatest questions asked in life.
C. Christian worldview is able to harmonize both natural revelation and special revelation.

**A. Explanatory Power:**

5. Objective moral values, duties, virtues, & accountability;
6. Objective Beauty & our capacity to experience beauty;
7. Existential human need for God (inward knowledge of the divine-a hole in the heart);
8. The intrinsic need for meaning, purpose, and value in life (and fulfillment thereof in Christ);
9. Inherent value and depravity of man;
10. Human Conscience
11. Both moral & natural evil & suffering in the world;
12. Miracles;
13. The person and work of Jesus Christ;
14. The historical bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ;
A. Explanatory Power:

15. The inherent search for both redemption from sin & immortality;
16. Value and respect of all persons (all made in the image of God);
17. Similar accounts of life-after-death type experiences;
18. Our capacity for critical thinking skills;
19. Our relationship to, distinction from, and stewardship of environment.
20. Abiding joy, hope, and comforting hope.

B. Answers the Greatest Questions:

1. Origin: Where did we come from?
2. Identity: What are we? Who are we?
3. Meaning: Why are we here?
4. Morality: How should we live?
5. Destiny: Where are we going?
6. Evil: What’s gone wrong with the world?
7. Hope: What can be done to fix the problems of the world?

C. Harmonized Starting Point for a Christian Worldview (natural & Special Revelation)

C1. Uniqueness of Scripture
C2. Existential Experiences
C3. Reliability of Scripture

C1.1 Arguments to and from Natural Revelation
C1.2 Arguments to and from Special Revelation

C2.1 The God of the Bible
C2.2 The Person & Work of Christ

C3.1 Historical Bodily Resurrection of Christ
C3.2 Historical Evidences

D. The Following Major Categories Fall Under Ethics:

Descriptive Ethics: A sociological discipline that produces moral norms or rules as its end product. Anthropologists often use it in their fieldwork to describe the distinctiveness of other cultures.

Normative Ethics: Refers to the discipline that produces moral norms or rules as its end product. Normative ethics prescribes moral behavior whereas descriptive ethics describes moral behavior.

Metaethics: Investigates the meaning of moral language, or the epistemology of ethics, and also considers the justification of ethical theories and judgments. For example, it focuses on the meaning of the major terms used in ethics, such as right, good, and just.

Artaic Ethics: Focuses on the virtues produced in the people, no the morality of specific acts.
Let's now answer the following questions:

1. What is it to live a morally good life?
2. Are moral principles valid as they depend on cultural approval or are there universal moral truths?
3. Why should I be moral?
4. Is there a right answer to every problem in life?

Consider the Kitty Genovese Case:

In Kew Gardens, Queens, in New York City, a young woman, Kitty Genovese, was brutally stabbed in her neighborhood late at night while 38 respectable, law-abiding citizens watched and listened as a killer stalked and stabbed her, left her, and returned to repeat the process two more times until she died. No one lifted a phone to call the police; no one shouted at the criminal, let alone went to Kitty’s aid. Finally, a 70-year-old woman called the police. It took them two minutes to arrive, but by that time Kitty was dead. Only one another woman came out to testify before the ambulance came, an hour later. Then the whole neighborhood poured out of their apartments. When asked why they didn’t do anything, their responses ranged from “I don’t know” and “I was tired” to “Frankly, we were afraid.”

Consider the following questions:

Who are our neighbors?
What should these respectable citizens have done?
What would you have done?
Are acts of omissions morally blameworthy?
How much risk should we undergo to help someone in danger?
Is it really right for you to judge the actions of the neighbors?
Who are you to judge the killer?
What kinds of generalizations can we make from this episode about our morally culture in America?
What do the levels of crime in our cities tell us about the moral climate of our society?

What should we consider when making a moral judgment?

1. The actions itself? This usually the focus of a moral judgment.
2. Evaluate the motives of a person performing the action? How about cases whereby the motive is the only difference between two otherwise identical actions?
3. Evaluate the consequences of a person’s actions and decisions? Some actions may be inherently right or wrong-regardless of the consequences?
4. Evaluate the character of that person? Character may be defined as the sum-total of one’s habits.
A closer look: Prolegomena: reality, language, & interpretation:

- The following charts expands our discussion of reality and combines it with language and interpretation.

THEORY OF PERCEPTION: As held by philosophers like John Locke & David Hume, there is a correspondence between mental images & objects in the real world. Sensory elements stand forever between us & external world.

If true ideas are pictures, images, or copies of real objects, then what we have in our mind and immediately know are only those pictures (not real forms). However, we can never really know whether or not those pictures correspond to real objects. In other words, how can we be sure whether the images are accurate likeness?

FUNCTIONAL AGNOSTIC GAP: We inherently contaminate reality because of our human limitations; all interpretations are provisional though legitimate meaning and doctrinal truths are held with absolute conviction.

POSTCONSERVATIVE RELATIONAL VIEW OF REALITY: Experience is the enduring existence of Christianity.

Post-conservative relational view of reality: Experience is the enduring existence of Christianity.

Common to previous models:

The starting point of interpretation is the readers' human limitations. The preconditions (lenses) by which they perceive all things impacts their understanding of the meaning of the texts or Text.
Common to previous three models:
Mutable framework of preconditions:

One potential solution to the problem with our prejudices, is that the Scripture will work in changing the interpreter's framework of beliefs. Is there a serious problem(s) with this view?

Critique:
1. If all aspects of our preconditions are mutable, then there are no immutable presuppositions or beliefs that provide the foundation upon which to verify a truth claim. They are left with preconditional circularity.

Critique:
2. While they acknowledge a prior commitment to the authority of the Bible, whereby the Bible is a non-negotiable fact, they also argue that all interpretations are provisional because of our human limitations. They are logically inconsistent.

Critique:
We have three other reasons why we can reject representational model, correspondence theory model, functional agnostic model, and the postconservative relational model:
1. We have no reason to believe that these theories are true (they are self-defeating):
2. They do not help us to understand the operations of the mind any better (e.g., does not explain the process of perception, and with regard to memory and imagination, it introduces confusion);
3. Historically & philosophically led to skepticism, solipsism, and even nihilism.

Three Other Models:
- George Berkeley's Idealism.
- Direct Realism.
- Moderate Thomistic Model.

George Berkeley's (1685-1753) Idealism:
- The Idea
  - Direct Projection: From God
  - God Himself

Berkeley denies the existence of material substance. Minds (or spirits) & their ideas are all that exist. While minds are essentially active, ideas are passive & inert. Our ideas of sense perception are not caused by material objects that lie behind a veil of perception, but directly by God; He is the direct cause of our ideas which are both immediate & indubitable. What we call objects are simply ideas of sense (projections from God), which exist only in the mind. An object unperceived by a person can still exist because it is perceived by God. Berkeley’s argument is used to refute both atheism and skepticism.
DIRECT REALISM: Mind-and-language independent world.

Our foundational beliefs rest upon direct access to the real world & objective truth.

The Idea

SELF-EVIDENT

The Object itself

DIRECT AWARENESS: SELL-EVIDENT

We see a thing for what it is; we have the capacity to recognize & categorize. From many observations we develop a concept of what a red apple is. We learn to associate a term with our awareness of the object by use of language. The object is indeed the kind of thing. We lack to confirm what we had already seen.

Apple, anyone?

- We saw object X as it is;
- We learned to associate the apple’s picture with the word “apple”;
- We developed a concept of what a red apple is from many observations;
- We can go into the grocery store’s produce section and be able to pick out a red apple from among other kinds of apples.

Consider the following:

By way of illustration R. Scott Smith states:

Allison can know that her light is on even though this knowledge is not completely certain: The proposition Allison takes herself to know that the light is on, but in fact it is not self-contradictory. However, Allison’s knowledge that the light is on does not require that this proposition be self-contradictory. Thus one can have knowledge even though it is logically possible that one is mistaken. In fact, we sometimes contrast knowing something with know it with certainty, implying that there is a contrast between knowing with certainty and simply knowing. Thus simple knowing is still knowing even if it is not certain [ibid., 363].

Consider the following:

He goes on to say:

But how do we know this? This leads to a crucial point: we each can compare the object that is given in our experience with our concept of that object, to see if they match up. That is, I can compare my thought of something to that thing as it is given in my experience. I can see if they are the same or different, and can see if my thought of that thing does (or does not do) anything to modify it. This is where I think we must pay every close attention to what is present before our minds in experience, for we can compare our concepts with things in the world, and we can see that they are different, and that my thought (or, awareness, or language use) does not modify its object.

3 Kinds of Knowledge:

- Simple Seeing: Knowledge by acquaintance. Thus, I have a direct awareness of object X:
  - It is not limited to sense perception; we have conscience as well (e.g., natural, moral law).
  - Simple seeing comes before the formulation of a concept.
- Seeing as: the formulation of a mental judgment. For example, seeing “red” on an apple formulates a concept of redness.
- Seeing that: We have reasons for our belief; it is justified true belief (e.g., we are able to pick out a red apple from among other colored apples).

Consider the following:

In the JETS article, “Post-Conservatives, Foundationism, and Theological Truth: A Critical Evaluation” (June 2005) R. Scott Smith argues the following:

1. Foundationism or basic beliefs do not require indubitability or inescapable certainty in order for a truth claim to be justified (e.g., we exist; Jesus is the only way to God).

2. If we have ample reasons or evidence for our belief, than the burden of proof is upon the person who challenges us. He contends that we can, and often do.
Consider the following:

Lastly, R. Scott Smith claims:

As [Dallas] Willard argues, even those who deny such access to the real world do this all the time, yet they additionally hold that in thinking, seeing, or mentally acting upon some object, we modify it, such that we cannot get to the real thing in itself. But this is nonsense, as that very ability to access the real, objective world is presupposed in that denial [Ibid., 361].

Consider the following:

Norman Geisler argues for validity in interpretation by claiming that all textual meaning is in the text itself. Geisler states, “The objective meaning of a text is the one given to it by the author, not the one attributed to it by the reader” [Geisler, Systematic Theology, 1:173].

He goes on to say, “The meaning is not found beyond the text (in God’s mind), beneath the text (in the mystic’s mind), or behind the text (in the author’s unexpressed intention); it is found in the text (in the author’s expressed meaning). For instance, the beauty of a sculpture is not found behind, beneath, or beyond the sculpture. Rather it is expressed in the sculpture” [Ibid., 1:174].

The writer’s purpose is the final cause of its meaning (for which).

The writer is the efficient cause of the meaning of a text (by which).

Geisler applies Aristotle’s six causes of meaning to the issue of objectivity:

- The writer is the efficient cause of the meaning of a text (by which).
- The writer’s purpose is the final cause of its meaning (for which).
- The writing is the formal cause of its meaning (of which).
- The words are the material cause of its meaning (out of which).
- The writer’s ideas are the exemplar cause of its meaning (after which).
- The laws of thought are the instrumental cause of its meaning (through which).

Bibliography: