

## **Ethical Treatment of Others**

The New Testament identifies numerous specific acts of sin that may be committed against another person. For instance, in Romans 13:9, Paul writes: "For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not seal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Take the act of stealing; there are more ways to steal than to physically remove money or possessions from the person of another. In fact, one may steal something from another person, without the thing ever having been in the actual possession of the rightful owner. One might defraud another of something and never confess to theft, because they have not understood they have committed that sin. This kind of stealing, which happens frequently, results from a lack of care or of understanding about the matter of ethics.

A standard definition of ethical behavior might be: the rules one should live by and apply in his treatment of others. But this definition may come up just a bit short. Ethics also involves actions which may or may not be criminal in nature, yet result in just or unjust outcomes. There are those whose intent it is to defraud others; their acts generally fall under the headings of unjust and criminal. When these people are found out they usually find themselves spending some time in jail.

There is a larger group of people who engage in behavior that is unethical and unjust when there is no deliberate intent to defraud another person yet that results anyway. These people ignore the scriptural mandate to not only look out for their own well being, but also the wellbeing of others (Phil. 2:4). They ignore the charge Paul set before the Corinthian church to do that which is honest (2 Cor. 13:7). They trod underfoot the lofty verse we refer to as the golden rule: "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets" (Matt. 7:12).

Why do many have the tendency to seek their own welfare even to the extent of disregarding the fact that they have morally, if not criminally, defrauded someone else? Sadly, the most obvious answer is that people are taught even from an early age to watch out for "old number one." Children are over-taught about how special and important they are. They hear every day that they have the right to set their own ethical standards, and make their own decisions based on the assertion that there are no moral absolutes. Children are taught these ideas in the public school system, hear them from their friends, and some have them confirmed by their parents. They hear it so long and so consistently that they grow up with the idea that everything "is about me!" To use a common refrain they learn it is alright to "throw everyone else under the bus" as long as you are able to place yourself in the driver's seat. Those who end up with tread marks across their bodies often include friends and family members. It's all about me, you see; what I want, what I need, and what makes me happy.

Have you ever been cheated? More than likely you have. Have you ever been cheated by someone who denied they cheated you? You may have been a victim of that kind of treachery, too. Why were you? It is because you live in the midst of a population consumed with greed, covetousness, and concern only for themselves. What a different world it would be if all people would heed the words of 1 Corinthians 10:24: "Let no man seek his own, but each his neighbor's good" (ASV).

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