



Week #3a: Telling the Truth

- **Truthfulness, Integrity, Trust and Things That Undermine Trust**
- **Ethics in Evangelism: Dual Roles, Informed Consent and Paternalism**

Ps. 51:6: “Surely you desire truth in my inmost parts...”

Prayer Before Studying Ethics:

Almighty Father, you have given your only Son Jesus Christ to die for our sins and to rise again for our justification: grant that we may put away the old leaven of corruption and wickedness, and always serve you in sincerity and truth; through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

--Book of Common Prayer, Easter 1

Opening Question: What thoughts/issues were raised for you in reading Marshall’s account of trust?

I. The Importance of Trust

- **Hiding and Disclosing the Truth: How It Affects Trust**
- **Ethics in Evangelism**
- **Paternalism: How to Manipulate People For Their Own Good**

(Read photocopied selection from Batten)

Questions:

- How can there be any ethical or moral issues attached to evangelism? Provided one is accurately presenting the gospel message, how could any questions be raised about the propriety of what one is doing?
- Why does Batten present the story about the scavenger hunt at the beginning of her discussion of the ethics of evangelism? How does this story lay the basis for the subsequent discussion?

One of the most difficult areas to navigate in evangelism and missions is not who to reach or how to get there but how to truthfully identify oneself to non-Christians with whom you wish to share the Gospel.

There is an ethical obligation to maintain truthfulness and transparency in identifying one's religious values, evangelistic goals and missionary vocation;

- As Marshall (*Trust*) has noted, significant relationships cannot be developed without trust and trust cannot exist where there is not a confidence in the other person’s integrity (trustworthiness). This requires
 - a) an appropriate degree of transparency concerning one’s motives in pursuing the relationship;
 - b) a relatively non-instrumental approach to the relationship (i.e. the other person is not seen as a means to some end one is oneself pursuing)

- i. Instead the relationship with the other person is in some sense an end in itself, even though
- ii. the relationship may also display and/or realize certain moral and spiritual goods which point beyond the relationship to higher things
 - a. Compare Paul's use of marriage as pointing to some aspects of our relationship with Christ and
 - b. Paul's spiritual friendships with Barnabas, Timothy, and Priscilla and Aquila which, though valued in and of themselves, ultimately pointed beyond the friendship to Jesus Christ.
- c) loyalty (=reliability/consistency in the way one responds; a certain faithfulness is demonstrated over time) in
 - following through on promises and keeping commitments,
 - maintaining confidences (i.e. not disclosing to others sensitive or damaging personal information about the friend or confidante without his or her express permission)
 - doing these things not only when it is convenient but in situations of adversity when this is inconvenient and/or unpopular.

Trust is something that must be built up over time, but can easily be subverted (and relationships undermined and destroyed) when any one of these three features are compromised, i.e. by

- deception and/or hidden motives;
- using the other person to obtain some benefit or advantage for oneself;
- disloyalty, broken promises or revealing of confidential information,

in which case a perception of integrity and trustworthiness is replaced by suspicion and mistrust.

Trust is often undermined in situations where there are potential conflicts of interest at work in one's promotion of a particular position and/or one's recruitment of others to a particular group.

This can be particularly serious when there is confusion (including intentional confusion) of the boundaries separating

- friendship (as a reciprocal exchange between two people which is not governed by largely self-interested motives) from
- a quasi-commercial pattern of exchange where one person tries to get the other to adopt a new belief and take up a new practice (with rewards given to the successful persuader, though these rewards were, at the beginning of the relationship, not immediately obvious to the person who was to be persuaded)

Example: A friend calls you up and tells you about a great business opportunity he's discovered which you will certainly want to know about. Of course it turns out to be a solicitation for Amway and he wants you to buy Amway stuff from him and perhaps even start selling Amway yourself to other people. You are mad because he

- a. did not tell you his real goal at the beginning of the conversation, but instead concealed his real (primary) purpose/motive from you by pretending that he wanted to talk to you for a rather different reason.
 - He conceals his true primary purpose/motive by pretending that something else is actually his primary purpose/motive when it is not.
 - The true primary purpose/motive is only revealed later, so that the relationship unexpectedly changes in character and is now focused upon a premise and an objective quite different from those to which one had previously agreed.
- b. used your friendship as a means to pressure you so that he could get certain benefits for himself (exploitation/commercialization of a non-commercial relationship).

Examples of (a) above are particularly noticeable in the way that Christian sectarian groups try to recruit people to their particular group:

- Seventh-Day Adventist summer missionaries going door-to-door selling books about protecting your children from drugs
- Mormon missionaries offering videos on improving your family life
- the International Church of Christ [Boston Movement] inviting you to a Bible study so you can make new friends and perhaps even find a potential marriage partner.

Q. So what's the matter with all this? After all, it works, doesn't it? It gets people's attention and allows them to hear the message and join the group. Why is there a problem here?

A. First, it rests upon a questionable theological belief, which seems to run something like this: God needs you to be deceptive or manipulative because God can't further His Kingdom without your deception or manipulation. (This in turn teaches church members that deception and manipulative methods of communication are not only acceptable, but even necessary.)

Second, It violates what Batten calls the "fiduciary principle" (p. 149), which is basic to all forms of professional ethics:

One should act "in a way that is worthy of the client's trust and does not undermine those interests with respect to which the client consults him or her" and which constitute the reason why the client consults him or her.

This is generally seen as the basic principle upon which the other fundamental principles of professional ethics rest:

- truthfulness: honesty and transparency (rather than deception and misrepresentation) in all relations with the client;
- maintaining confidentiality: not releasing confidential information, about the client without their explicit and informed consent;
- avoiding breach of trust: not using purported friendship or the appeal of unrelated benefits to pressure someone to change their belief or behavior;
- not using the power associated with one's professional position for purposes outside the professional relationship: For example, if your physician refused to

tell you his diagnosis of your ailment unless you read through a Four Spiritual Laws tract with him! (This is not something essentially related to the reason why you consulted the physician.)

Objection: But you don't understand! The other person needs what I (we) have to offer them, even if they don't recognize it yet! That's why extraordinary measures must be used to help get them to where they need to be (i.e. adopt this belief, join this group, buy this amazing product, get in on this incredible deal).

Because (a) this is so good, important and necessary for them and

(b) they do not recognize this yet,

it is perfectly legitimate (and for their own benefit) for me (us) to bend the normal ethical rules a bit and use extraordinary measures to persuade or constrain the other person(s).

Paternalism: Behavior which is aggressive, deceptive, manipulative or coercive may be justifiable if the person who is to be persuaded would thereby receive a great benefit and avoid a great (i.e. unacceptably serious) harm (which they have either not yet foreseen or not yet taken as seriously as they should)--e.g. going to heaven (benefit to be attained) vs. being cast into hell (harm to be avoided).

It is therefore legitimate to try to supply the needs (and correspondingly regulate the behavior) of another person/persons over whom one has some form of authority and whom one believes to be incapable of discerning and/or meeting these needs himself/herself/themselves.

The paternalist believes that he or she understands the person's interests (i.e., the other person's problems and fundamental needs) better than they do themselves. ("It's for their own good.")

Compare the relationship between parent and child; the parent intervenes and constrains the child (limiting the child's freedom or coercing the child) to prevent the child from harming himself/herself.

The severity of the violation of the other person's liberty (or other moral rules) is justified by reference to the seriousness of the harm to the other person's interests that would result without intervention (e.g. eternal damnation).

A kinder, gentler version of paternalism: Liberal political theory's "soft paternalism" is a modified, toned-down version of paternalism that is commonly found in Western democracies. It runs something like this: People are normally capable of competently regulating their own affairs through rational decision-making ("rational autonomy"=being able to legislate goals for oneself and establish for oneself the most appropriate means to pursue these goals).

Interference in an individual's affairs is therefore

- justified when the individual's choice-making capacities are impaired, but
- not justified to protect a normally functioning individual from what someone else considers to be great harm but is nonetheless in accord with
 - that individual's choices and
 - the values that individual uses to determine the course of his or her life.

Thus, for example, we may think that being hooked on heroin is harmful but we don't therefore arrest every identifiable heroin addict, imprison them in rehab centers and force them to take methadone.

The choice to take heroin is theirs and they themselves will have deal with the consequences that follow from this.

There is no justification for trying to prevent them from

(a) making a certain choice ["I choose to take heroin"] or

(b) converting that choice into action [i.e. seeking to obtain the heroin and shooting it into one's veins]

Similarly, even if a person with psychiatric problems repeatedly fails to take their medication and therefore ends up living on the street and getting arrested by the police for disorderly conduct, we are not thereby entitled to confine him/her to a locked ward and make him/her take the drugs against their will. Instead he/she will have to regulate his/her own life as best he or she can and deal with the consequences of failing to take his/her anti-psychotic medication in a timely manner.

The Roots of Paternalism?: Making Oneself Do Things To Avoid Harm And/OR Receive Benefits Even When One Lacks Knowledge Or Lacks the Knowledge That Something Is True

Paternalism can be seen as a potentially illegitimate extension to others of a legitimate form of rational prudence we often use in making decisions about matters where we lack clear and certain knowledge but there is a potential of suffering harm, from which we must protect ourselves.

Pascal's wager--To justify the adoption of a religious belief, it is not necessary to have certainty; rational prudence (protecting oneself by positioning oneself to avoid possible harm and receive possible benefits) can be enough.

E.g. You think the Christian message is probably true but are not certain. It still makes sense (=is rational and prudent) to become a Christian because

(1) if you adopt this belief and it is true, you will receive a benefit (heaven) and avoid a harm (hell); but

(2) if it is false and there is no God or afterlife, you will not come to serious harm, only have had to put in a bit of inconvenient extra work (praying or attending worship services or whatever).

Even without being certain about the truth of the Christian faith, one can still reasonably choose the Christian faith as the most appropriate way to avoid serious harm and receive the greatest benefit.

Can be generalized from the individual (Pascal on prudence as self-protection) to apply to other people. (The paternalist should act to protect the interests of the other person/persons and preserve them from harm.)

Evangelism in Mission

One interesting problem (raised by Pierce) is whether missionaries may legitimately enter a restricted-access country (i.e. one that bans or severely restricts evangelism and does not issue visas for Christian missionaries) under false pretences (keeping secret their true purpose/motive in seeking residence in the country and the true source of their funding-- which is often received indirectly— and pretending instead to be engaged in relief work or a non-profit service organization).

As Gvosdev shows, this lack of transparency regarding

- purpose of residency in country,
- nature of work engaged in, and
- source of funding

is similar to the ambiguities created when government intelligence agencies engage in espionage and covert operations. The same ambiguities can be observed in connection with other forms of clandestine activities that more directly contravene the law (e.g. smuggling).

While some forms of covert evangelism may be legitimate, others may be morally questionable and may also confirm the impression of locals that Christian workers are engaged in clandestine subversive behavior on behalf of another national government and are therefore not to be trusted.