

# *What is ethics?*

- Ethics is a branch of philosophy that concerns itself with questions of
  - right and wrong,
  - good and evil,
  - virtues and vices.
- There are three levels of ethics:
  - Meta-ethics (what is ethics?)
  - Normative ethics (what is good and right?)
  - Applied ethics (how to apply to contexts, issues and practices?)

# The Moral and Ethical Teaching of the Old Testament

Understanding Ethics: A Christian Perspective

# Where to look in the Old Testament?

*What kind of books do we find...?*

- 1) The Pentateuch («five books of Moses»)
- 2) The historical books
- 3) The Psalms (poetry)
- 4) The Wisdom literature
- 5) The Prophets

# The Pentateuch (I): Genesis 1-3

- Everything begins with God (ch. 1)
- The dignity of human beings (ch. 1-2)
  - Image of God, the pinnacle of creation (ch. 1)
  - Life and its many levels (dust, mystery, creativity, work) (ch. 2)
  - Life and human relationships (men / women, language, marriage) (ch. 2)
- Temptation, fall and alienation (ch. 3)
  - The power of moral choice
- The way of hope and recovery (ch. 3)
  - Biblical realism and hope...

# The Pentateuch (II): Genesis 12 and 15

- The calling of Abraham
  - His faith (trust) in God
- The promises to Abraham (and his «seed»)
- The responsibility of Abraham and his descendants

# The Pentateuch (III): Exodus 20

- *The Ten Commandments*
  - Preamble: Freedom and the Law
- Commandments **1-4**
  - protects the sanctity of our allegiance to God.
- Commandments **5-10**
  - 5+7: protects the sanctity of love, marriage and family life
  - 6+8: protects the sanctity of life and of private property
  - 9: protects the sanctity of truth
  - 10: cuts deeper, to «the scheming in one's mind»

# Discussion / reflection

- To what extent are ***The Ten Commandments*** unique – and to what extent do we find these protected values elsewhere?
- Which of these protected values are especially threatened today in our societies / cultures?

# The Pentateuch (IV): Leviticus 4

- Principle: Substitutionary sacrifice
- The way of sacrifice and the value of life
- The consequences of sin and the penalty of sin
- The animal sacrifices (OT) and the Cross (NT)



# The historical books: Two personal stories

- The way of personal experience
  - 1 Samuel 1
  - Hannah
  - Marriage and parenthood as a sacred calling
- The way of the king
  - 1 Samuel 17
  - David
  - His political values
  - The poetry and prophecy of king David (in the Psalms and the Prophets)

# The Wisdom literature

- Proverbs
  - How to live a life of wisdom
  - «The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom»
  - When living by wisdom, we are blessed by God
- Big questions from Ecclesiastes and Job
  - Is there any meaning «under the sun»?
  - Why does the godly person suffer?

# The Way of the Prophets

- Amos
  - Exposed and denounced both the sins of «the Gentiles» and of the Jews
- Isaiah
  - The Suffering Servant – a prophecy of salvation (Is. 53)
- Jeremiah
  - A new covenant – a prophecy of salvation (Jer. 31)

# Reflection / discussion

- How would you summarize some of the key elements in the ethical and moral teaching of the the Old Testament?
- How would you apply this teaching today...?
- What are the most challenging aspects...?
- What are the most encouraging aspects...?