# Introduction to Ethics What is good and right?



"a system of moral principles by which human actions and proposals may be judged good or bad, right or wrong" (*Macquarie Dictionary*)

## Three **Broad Options**





"Can we **lie to save life**?"



**Possible goals might include:** glorifying God, imitating Jesus Christ, doing the loving thing, maximising the possible human good, minimising evil, etc.





*How adequate* do you think a teleological ethic is?



**Possible motives might include:** love for God, love for other people, self-love, faith, a desire to please God, etc.





» Jesus: "This is my command: love each other." (Jn 15:17) and, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matt 22:37-40).

» St Augustine: "love and do what you like!"

*How adequate* do you think a motivational ethic is?



**Possible directing principles might include:** the 10 Commandments, other commandments in the Bible, other rules, etc.



- » The good moral act is the one which is based on right and good principles.
- » Right and good principles are prior revealed or self-evident.
- » There are absolute rights and wrongs.
- » Christian ethical approaches normally incorporate directing principles.

### The Possibility

of Moral Dilemmas

- » A deontological ethic raises the possibility of moral dilemmas whereas teleological and moral approaches do not.
- » A moral dilemma is a situation in which there is a conflict between absolutes, that is, between alternative God-given moral norms that allow no exceptions. Whichever course of action a person follows in such a situation, he will set aside or somehow violate at least one moral norm.
- » The example of the villagers of Le Chambon involves a clash between the obligation to save innocent life and the duty to speak the truth. Either the villagers save the Jews, but lie to do it, or they speak truth, but shirk their responsibility to help innocent victims. At a basic level, the value of life conflicts with the value of truth.

## Three Approaches to *Moral Dilemmas*



#### Unqualified or Non-Conflicting Absolutism:

There are no real moral dilemmas. Do what God's word clearly says even if the consequences seem to be detrimental. The consequences are in the realm of God's providence. Our duty is to obey.

#### Conflicting Absolutism (the lesser evil view):

God has given many universal and absolute moral norms. Ideally, apart from sin, these absolutes do not conflict. But because sin pervades this world, God's absolutes will sometimes actually conflict. In these situations, sin is unavoidable, and we must therefore choose the lesser of two evils and ask God for forgiveness.

#### Graded Absolutism (the greater good view):

There are moral absolutes, but they are capable of resolution without sin being inevitable because some are higher than others. For example, it is a greater good to save life than to tell the truth.

## An Approach **to Ethics**



*Goal:* To maximise the human good | *Motive:* Love for God and for humankind. *Directing Principle:* Christian worldview derived from scripture.