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By Sergio Fortes

Ethics: Outward Actions Based On Inner Motives

Ethics has always been a challenge into business and professional world, and despite many advances and changes, it might be an even greater challenge in the 21st century. The word "ethics" is derived from the ancient Greek, ethos, which meant, "our place while human, "or "the place where we live. "In that sense, ethos or ethics can be regarded as "our home."

This reminds me of when my father would address our entire family around the table after dinner. Concerning certain actions or behaviors that he considered unacceptable, emphatically he would say, "Here in this home, this shall not be done." Basically, he was informing us of the "house rules," the standards, practices and traditions he expected each of us to uphold.

Obviously our home or place, as humans, is the home where we live, our marriage, the social group which we participate, the society where we live, our city, the neighborhood where we reside, the church where we worship with others, and the company where we earn our livelihood, what the Bible calls "our daily bread." Living according to a personal and professional code of ethics, in effect, means actions that make us feel "at home."

The Brazilian philosopher and educator, Prof. Dr. Mario Sergio Cortella, has presented a masterful conceptualization of ethics: "It is the set of principles and values that we use to answer three major questions of human life: Do I want? Should I do? Can I do? There are things we want, but we should not (acquire them). There are things that we should do, but we can't. There are things we can do, but we don't want to."

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Dilemmas like these permeate our everyday lives, invading the depth of our business relationships and the unseen, inward origins of our professional actions.

The Apostle Paul points out that when we do what we don't want, it is because we are dominated by an inner force or impulse which he calls "sin": *"Now if I do what I do not desire to do, it is not myself that acts, but the sin which dwells within me fixed and operating in my soul"*(Romans 7.20).

One of the concepts of sin I have learned - I can't remember from whom - is that "sin is hitting the wrong target." We know what we should do, but trying to accomplish it, we have lost the target and hit something else instead.

The divine antidote for sin is forgiveness. When we admit our sins and confess it, God will help us to overcome them, providing forgiveness, empowering us to not want what we should not, and giving us the ability to do what we should: *"... He will forgive our sins and continuously cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1John 1.8-9).

However, having ethical guidelines and displaying proper ethical conduct - our home" - is more than possessing the intention to follow good practices, values or principles. It requires more than a simple desire, or even the exercising of our will. It demands an inner change, a new mindset.

In *Romans 12:2* we are told, *"Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."* Being "transformed" is not something we can accomplish on our own. It is something that, as the Bible tells us again and again, only Jesus can do! As *Galatians 2:20* assures each of His followers, *"I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me (by His Spirit)."*

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Reflection/Discussion Question

1. What is your concept of ethics?
2. What did you think of the original concept of ethics as "the place where we live?"
3. In your opinion, what can lead someone to stop doing what is right, and choosing instead to do the opposite?
4. Do you think that the force that drives people to do what they really don't want to do, and not do what they really want to do, is the sin? Explain what this means for you.

NOTE:

If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:

Proverbs 4:23; Ecclesiastes 12:14; Mathew 5:37, 7:9-12; Mark 12:17; Philippians 4:4-5

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