**The Difference between Ethics and Christian Ethics**

1. Ethics has to do with the standardized way of behaviour or conduct acceptable in any given institution or organization or society; while Christian ethics has to do with the exclusive way Jesus Christ his followers to adhere.
2. Ethics is a general behaviour accepted by all religions in a pluralistic perspective; while Christian ethics govern the total way of life of all Christians to the glory of God for eternal reward awaiting the faithful in heaven (another life).
3. Ethics could be a set of rules and regulations that members adhere to in institution or organization without themselves been affected by them; while Christian ethics is derived not from without but from the Bible as a way of life.
4. Christian ethics has a high standard with zero tolerance than ethics in terms of strictness.
5. Christian ethics is manifesting the lifestyle of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit that lives in our life; but ethics is you at  work to keep the rules.
6. Christian ethics is Christocentric, Theocentric, Pneuma-centric, and anthropocentric; while ethics is all about people only.

**ETHICAL SYSTEM**

**NB:** Christian Ethics is deontological (duty cantered) and not teleological (result centred). In Christian Ethics, there is no moral law without a moral law giver.

**Ethical Systems**

Norman Gersler in his book Christian Ethics (options and Issue) classified Ethical system into two categories.

1. Ethical Relativism             2. Ethical Absolutism.
2. Antinomianism            a. Unqualified absolutism
3. Situationism            b. Conflicting absolutism
4. Generalism             c. Graded absolutism

**ETHICAL RELATIVISM**

1. **Antinominism**: - Literally means “against” the law or instead of the law.”

* It holds that everything is relative. There are no binding moral laws.
* You are responsible for laws and actions.

There were many religious movements that influenced the use of Antinonianism

1. **Procession:-**Everything is in constant flow in the world. You cannot step into the same river or water twice.
2. **Hedonism:-** Pleasure is good and pain is bad-gives birth to relativism. What is pleasure for one is pain for another.
3. **Skepticism:-** Believes that every issue has two sides and every question can be argued to a statement since there is no firm and final conclusion that can be drawn, we must suspend judgement in all matters.

    The ethical implication is that nothing should ever be considered absolutely right or wrong.

**Movement’s Contribution (Antinomians)**

1. It stresses individual responsibility in that, the truth is made known- that is Ethics is ultimately a matter of personal responsibility by focusing on individual rather than universal.
2. It     recognises Emotive Element that says, not everything that takes the form of “thou shalt not” or “you ought not” is really a divine imperative. Many such statements are merely expressions of some individual’s feeling. People generally couch their personal feelings in the more powerful language of divine injunctions. The antinomians have helped us to be conscious of such abuses.
3. It stresses Personal Relation:

The antimonians stress personal relations instead of mere prescriptive regulations. Since Christian ethics focus on persons not laws, they help in advancing a perspective of Christian Ethics.

Conclusion: Antinonianism is self-defeating to deny all binding moral laws (values) it is also subjective since it could not provide rules for the game of life. It is also too individualistic since every man does what he likes. It creates room for lawlessness. It is also irrational since it entails the belief that the opposing views are both right.

1. **Situationism**

* One of the proponent of situation ethics, Joseph Fletcher advance this Ethical system.
* Situationism he believed is located between extreme legalism and extreme antinomianism.
* For Fletcher, there is only one law for everything. The law of love.
* This rule (law) he believed can be applied to every ethical situation.

According to Gersler, Fletcher presented six prepositions on what it means to apply love situationally (Geisler 1989:56). They are:

1. Only one thing is intrinsically good, namely, Love, Nothing else at all.
2. The ruling norm of Christian decision is love; Nothing else. Love replaces law. We follow law for the sake of love.
3. Love and justice are the same, for justice is love distributed.
4. Love will the neighbours good whether he like him or not.
5. Only the end justifies the means.
6. Love’s decision are made situationally not prescriptively.

**Contribution**

1. It is normative
2. It resolve the issue of conflicting norms
3. It gives due value to different circumstances
4. It stresses love and the value of persons.

**Conclusion**

Fletcher According to Geisler observed that one norm is too general, the situation does not determine the meaning of love, and there are possibilities of many universal norms, because people will have different norms applied for the same situation. Therefore, situationanism has no content that can be known in advance of or apart from the situation.

1. **Generalism**

    This system believes there are general binding rules that are not absolute. However they may have absolute ends. Geisler observed that they may have an absolute or ultimate result by which they judge all actions but they confess no absolute rules enabling one to realize this ultimate end of the greatest good for the greater number of people.”(Geisler 1989:64)

    Modern generation is said to be the heir of ancient hedonism which receives pleasure as the greatest good. It says that seeking physical pleasure and avoiding physical pains is the chief aim in life. It teaches that there are valid rules, beliefs and code to guide the society but none of these rules are universal.

* It claims that “the received code of ethics is by no means of divine right.” Norms are not as absolute, therefore when there is conflict, the conflict must be resolved by utilitarian principle (i.e the end justifies the means).

**Contribution**

1. There is need for norms for an orderly and peaceful society
2. It provides solution to conflict norms

**Conclusion**

    It should be observed that the end does not justify the means, at least should not. No universal law is generalism. Since the generalism has no absolute principle, his view tends to be reliable source for antinomianism. Geisler observed that unless there are some objective moral prescriptions that have substantive content which are binding on all persons at all times than at any given time; it’s possible that any action could be justified.

**ETHICAL ABSOLUTISM.**

*Unqualified Absolutism*

Definition: Unqualified Absolutism (hereafter designated as “UA”) is the ethical pattern governed by the determination that there are many definite ethical laws which must never be broken, that they are never in conflict with one another, and that, should they ever appear to be in conflict, it is only because the one perceiving the supposed conflict is confused or misinformed of the situation.

1. *Moral Precepts*  
   This view argues that all moral precepts are always absolute. Therefore, for any situation, one ought to do/not to do x. All moral conflicts are only apparent. It is always possible to do right, or to avoid doing something is always wrong. The Bible may indicate that there is a hierarchy of morals, but this does not mean that we are justified in violating any of them. Jesus was repeatedly put into situations which seemed to be dilemmas, and he always found a way out.
2. Biblical *Support*
3. The bible teaches that God is the same yesterday, today and forevermore” (Heb 13:8). Therefore that which he says is wrong.
4. Mt. 23:23 not only says that love justice and mercy are the weightier portions of the law. It also says that these should have been done without neglecting the others.
5. *Proponents of UA*:

**Augustine of Hippo** – Focused heavily in the subject of lying, and concluded that it is never appropriate to lie, not even to protect someone from the attacks of another.  He argued that although one might try to justify the sin of lying by suggesting that he was preventing the greater sin (perhaps a murder), it is still the fact that lying is a sin, and one may not sin without ramifications, regardless of the circumstances.

**Immanuel Kant** – He believed that lying was always wrong, but for a consideration of sinfulness, but rather because of what lying (like murder) always leads to, when it becomes accepted practice.  Calls truth telling (and life protecting) as a Universal Moral Duty, which must always apply to all people, of all cultures, in all scenarios.

**John Murray** -- He focuses heavily upon the concept of lying, but, rather than did Augustine, Murray says that the need for telling the truth is not to avoid sin, but rather because it is to draw closer to God, since Truth is part of the nature of God.  He cites that it is impossible for God to lie (Heb 6:18), and therefore, if we are to be more and more like Him, we too must abstain from lying in all cases. Charles Hodge

1. *Positives concerning UA*:

 It stems from a recognition concerning the unchanging nature of God –

 It stresses Rule over Result –

 It shows trust in God’s providence –

 It demands that there is always a way NOT to sin –

1. *Problems concerning UA*:

 Difficulties with definitions –

 Qualifying the unqualified –

 It does not take into account the scope of the will of God –

1. **Conflicting Absolutism**
2. *Moral Precepts*  
   this view argues that there are moral dilemmas and conflicts. In these cases, one should do the lesser evil. However, the lesser evil is still wrong even though one may be doing what is "humanly" right. Doing what fulfils the highest rule in a situation may be excusable if the actor did not precipitate the moral conflict through antecedent evil acts. But it may still be wrong in that it does not fulfilled every moral rule which applies to the situation. Hence tragic moral choices exist.
3. *Biblical Support*
   1. Ps. 51:5; Eph. 2:3 teach that people are entirely in sin anyway. Therefore, we should not worry about denying this, but simply rely on the grace of God for forgiveness. It is the nature of a fallen world to produce situations where sin is unavoidable.
   2. In the case of Christ, God the Father so arranged the situation that He preserved Jesus from such situations. This was because he was in his human nature as man but had no sinful nature.
   3. The word, "Ought" is not the same as "can." Man is not able to avoid sin, but he is still guilty.
   4. God is without sin, and he is immutable. He ordered us to obey our parents, and they might order us not to love God. In such a case, we would have to break the fifth commandment in order to keep the first. This does not mean that the fifth commandment no longer reflects true morality, as to do so would imply that God's character is either not moral or not immutable. The best solution is that this is a moral dilemma wherein one would have to commit sin.
   5. They claim the hierarchical model is nothing but situation ethics under a different name.
4. *Supporters*
   1. Martin Luther
   2. Helmut Thielicke
   3. J. I. Packer
   4. J. W. Montgonery

1. **Hierarchicalism**
2. *Moral Precepts*  
   In this view, one ought to do whatever fulfils the highest moral rule in a situation. When this is the case, such action is right, and the person in no way does wrong. Under this view, there are no tragic moral dilemmas. The lesser of two evils is a misnomer, it is argued, because such lesser evil is actually good.
3. *Biblical Support*
   1. Matt. 12:4-7  
      Christ said that the priests and David break the law, but that they are "innocent" (vs. 7). This demonstrates that when ethical hierarchy is followed, the resulting action is not morally evil.
   2. James 2:25  
      demonstrates that Rahab was "justified" when she lied about the spies. Also, see the midwives at the time of Moses, Peter and John disobeying the Sanhedrin in Acts 4 etc.
   3. Christ was "tempted in all ways as we are, yet without sin." (Heb. 4:15).  
      How could this be true under conflicting absolutism? Either he never experienced a moral conflict, in which case he was not tempted in all ways, or he did, in which case he would have to sin.
4. *Supporters*
   1. John Wesley?
   2. Norman Geisler
   3. J.J. Davis ("This view is also called contextual absolutism")
5. *Geisler's Seven Principles of Ethical Hierarchy*
   1. Persons are more valuable than things
   2. Infinite persons are more valuable than finite persons
   3. Complete persons are more valuable than incomplete persons
   4. Actual persons are more valuable than potential persons
   5. Potential persons are more valuable than actual things
   6. Many persons are more valuable than a few persons
   7. Personal acts which promote personhood are better than those which do not

1. **Graded Absolutism**

This ethical system has it that person has not sinned when he obey a higher moral law against a subordinate one. For instance obeying God instead of man as in the case of the three Hebrew young men Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. (Dan 3).

    The general premises for the Graded Absolutism are:

1. There are higher and lower moral laws not all moral laws are of equal weight. This premise holds Matt 23:23, John 19: 11, I Cor 13:13, John 15:13, Matt 2:36
2. There are unavoidable moral conflicts Abraham an Isaac (Gen 22cf Exo 20:13

* Samson committed suicide (Judges 16:30)
* Jephthah’s sacrifice of daughter (Judges ii)
* The Hebrew Midwives (Exo 1)

1. No guilt is imputed for the unavoidable.

God will not hold anyone responsible for doing the unavoidable and respecting the higher duty e.g. (Dan 6) civic disobedience.

1. Mercy overrules veracity,

An as absolute rule, The Bible abhors. Nevertheless to save a life (mercy) is a higher moral duty than depending on the facts. When in such moral dilemma one is bound to obey the higher moral duty without being guilty of neglecting the lower moral law.

Graded absolutism in an adjustment and a revised version of unqualified Absolutism. It was revised by the same Bishop Augustine and promoted by Charles Hodge. Hodge believed that truth is absolute based on God’s nature. Whatever militates against the truth or is hostile to the truth is in opposition to the very nature of God. However, he believed that there are occasions when one is justified intentionally by deceiving another. For instance in the case of Samuel deceiving Saul. (1 Sam 16).

    For Hodge any falsehood that is not directed at protecting self, sin or wickedness but protects life and the cause of God’s kingdom is justified. He believed misleading an enemy is also a justified falsification. In a situation of moral conflict as alluded above, the higher duty in to falsifying in order to protect another or God’s cause.in such situation one is not culpable.

    In conclusion, Geisler said the essentials of graded absolutism are: There are many moral principles rooted in the absolute moral character of God. There are higher and lower moral duties. For example, love for God is a greater duty than love for people and line for people is a greater duty than love for things; these moral laws and duties sometimes come into unavoidable moral conflicts. In such conflicts we are obligated to follow the higher moral law; when we follow the higher moral law we are not held responsible for not keeping the lower one.

    Relativism and Absolutism gives options for people ethical thoughts and action. Furthermore, for a Christian, ethical relativism is not an option whatsoever God’s character is unchanging and his law reflects his character. Therefore ethical absolutism sticks with the Lutheran tradition, and graded Absolutism exemplifies the Reformed Tradition.