



The Ethics of “Me”

If I think I am a good person, and my cause is noble, then I shall act as I choose.

We see this behavior in every workplace; but it is especially evident among individuals who have leaked classified government information to news media, recently. Public opinion vacillates over whether their actions are heroic or destructive to democracy.

The courts will deal with the legal issues. Meanwhile, one issue is not being addressed in any depth: the ethics of what the leakers have done.

Ethics

Ethics asks questions, such as: *To whom am I responsible and for what? What is right and wrong according to whose values? Who gets to decide?* Applied to the workplace, what are our personal and professional values, and how do we apply them?

The Ethics of Self

Among those who have leaked classified materials, the priority of self is evident in their ethics. Evidently, they believe: *If I think I am a good person, and my cause is noble, then it is alright for me to act as I choose.* Read or listen to what the ‘leakers’ say. The pronoun, “I,” comes up again and again. “I” is coupled with “think,” “feel,” “believe.” These expressions are self-referenced, with “I” and “my” values at the center of “my” actions.

Self-referencing poses a danger to the common good and democracy. It imposes one person’s values on the many without their consent or knowledge. There are consequences for the individual, if caught. But, the consequences for the many can be catastrophic (eg., revealing classified information indiscriminately to the media).

The problem with self-referencing is how it opens us to the spirit of evil. Evil is much more clever and smart than us! That’s why it has been so successful in separating people from God and each other, since time began. Evil can –and often does – convince people that they are acting for the common good. But, when we are self-referenced, we are exposed – one on one – to the unrestricted power of evil.

Christian Ethics

In contrast with self-referenced ethics, Christian ethics holds God and God’s values at the center of who we are and what we do. No person, value or priority is ahead of God. You may think you are a good person - and in some ways, you may be. But, in Christian ethics, it does not always follow that we may act as we decide.

Jesus called his followers into community, with himself and his teachings at the center. He calls us to discern his will in community, not only (eg., through personal prayer) on our own. Evil works everywhere. Without the safeguards of Jesus' community to nurture our faith and values, knowledge and understanding, we leave ourselves open to the workings of evil, one on one. Community does not give us immunity from evil, but it does raise the bar of ethics beyond self-referencing.

Some Ethical Principles to Consider

Pitting one's personal values, whether self or Christ-centered, against an employer opens a Pandora's box of issues. What if an employee discovers that his/her employer is stealing pension funds, and can prove it? What if a company is known to be making a product, which is dangerous to the common good? Christ-centered and community values can help us respond responsibly, and positively affect change where 'going it alone' could be destructive.

1) Jesus called us into community. Communities are not perfect because of human nature, and they make mistakes. But, there are checks, balances and accountability within a community which one does not have on one's own. So, when an individual feels called to blow the whistle on an organization, it is best not to self-reference and make unilateral decisions/actions.

2) The First Commandment requires that God and God's values (love) be the center of our lives. We are accountable to God for everything we do. "I" is held subordinate to "You" (God). Our referencing must be to God, not self.

Conclusion

Discussions on whether leaking classified information is dangerous or heroic need to include ethics. Ethics asks: *To whom are we responsible, and for what?* May we do what we want, if we believe that our values are just, and our cause is noble? According to God's laws, **no**.

No matter how wrong we think our governments are in what they do, we must remember that God requires us to live by God's values. We may protest, vote and argue with our political representatives. But, in doing so, we must honor God's values by following them.

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