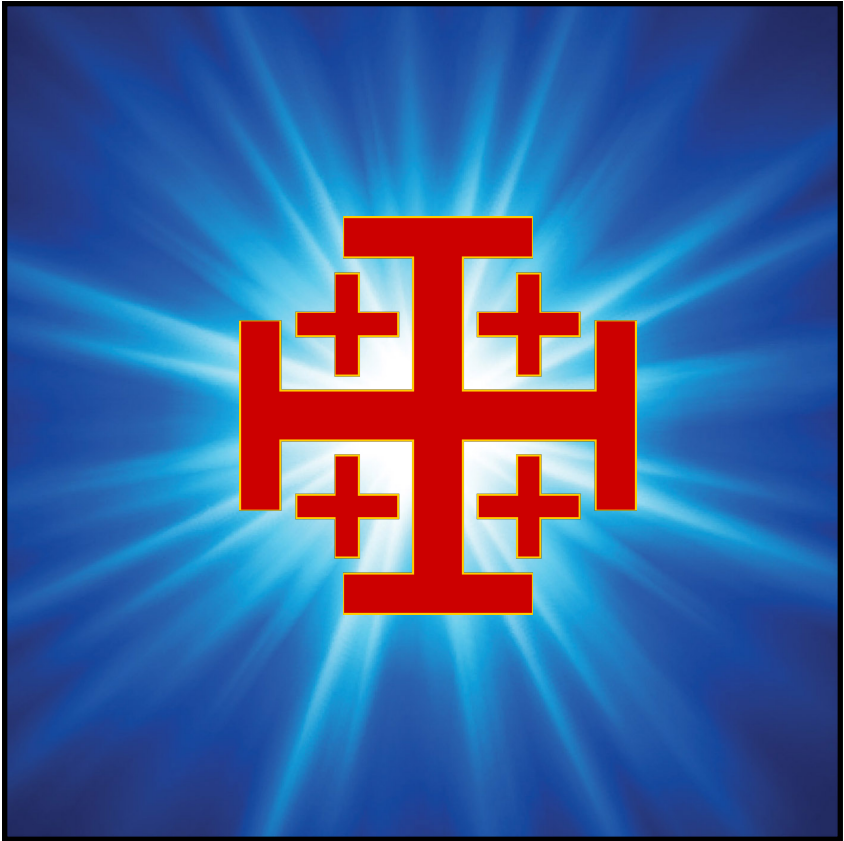


# THE LIGHT

## Our Moral Compass



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**Dedicated to all those who may not think alike,  
but do their best to love alike.**



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| <b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>                       | <b>5</b>   |
| 1. Defining Ethics .....                        | 7          |
| 2. Biblical Ethics .....                        | 17         |
| 3. The Christian Virtues: Love and Justice..... | 25         |
| 4. Christ and Culture.....                      | 35         |
| 5. The Moral Light .....                        | 45         |
| 6. Marriage .....                               | 61         |
| 7. Race Relations .....                         | 73         |
| 8. Class or Status .....                        | 83         |
| 9. Economics .....                              | 89         |
| 10. Political Organization .....                | 97         |
| 11. War and Revolution .....                    | 105        |
| 12. The Church .....                            | 117        |
| <b>CONCLUSIONS .....</b>                        | <b>125</b> |
| <b>APPENDICES .....</b>                         | <b>127</b> |
| Ethics and Morals: A Definition .....           | 128        |
| Ethics and Morals: More Definitions.....        | 129        |
| Ethics 101 .....                                | 131        |
| Situation Ethics: A Brief Outline .....         | 134        |
| The Ten Commandments .....                      | 135        |
| The Two Tablets of the Law.....                 | 136        |
| The Ten Commandments Compared .....             | 137        |
| The Ten Commandments Contrasted .....           | 138        |
| The Great Commandments .....                    | 139        |
| Holiness .....                                  | 140        |
| Holiness: A Chart.....                          | 141        |
| The Purpose of Life .....                       | 142        |
| The Purpose of Marriage .....                   | 143        |
| Medical Ethics: Some Questions .....            | 144        |
| <b>OTHER BOOKS BY THE AUTHOR .....</b>          | <b>145</b> |



## INTRODUCTION

Ethics and morality are difficult topics. Everyone has their own ethic or morality; therefore, I do not expect to present an ethic that everyone will accept. The best that I can do is to define and illustrate some of the methods and options.

I shall begin by trying to define ethics. The difficulty lies in the fact that there are as many definitions of ethics as there are people; nevertheless, we must attempt to define ethics for ourselves. Looking at how others define ethics may help us with our own definition.

If we don't believe in God, then we will move towards a philosophical ethic, and if we do believe in God, then we will develop a theological ethic. If we are searching for a Christian Ethic, then we must deal with divine revelation, Scripture, and the teachings of Jesus. This may sound simple. Jesus summarized his teachings into the Great Commandments of love for God and one's neighbor, including the enemy. He also gave us the Sermon on the Mount and the Golden Rule of doing unto others as we would have them do unto us.

When dealing with a Christian ethic, we cannot ignore the Ten Commandments and the Jewish Scriptures. Jesus claimed to accept the Law of Moses, but then he gave it a new interpretation. How did Paul and the early church deal with the Jewish Scriptures, and how should we?

The two greatest Christian virtues are love and justice. How do they fit into Christian ethics? As soon as we begin to apply these virtues, we run into cultural demands that clash. Should we reject culture as evil or attempt to transform it?

After I have done the above, my purpose will be to develop my own approach to moral behavior. I will attempt to answer the question, "Who and what, guides me in responding to the ethical dilemmas that we all face in the modern world. If your primary interest in reading this book is to understand my own approach, then you may skip over to chapter five, *The Moral Light*. From the very start, I realize that not everyone will agree with my conclusions, but that's okay.

As a Christian, I will focus on the Will of God as revealed in Jesus Christ, but I recognize how difficult it is to discern the Will of God. I have read Leslie Weatherhead's classic book, *The Will of God*, and have found his Intentional Will, Circumstantial Will, and Ultimate will

helpful, but I'm primarily interested in God's Intentional and Circumstantial Will. I'll leave God's Ultimate will up to God.<sup>1</sup>

How does one discern the Will of God? This is as much a theological task as it is an ethical task. This will involve identifying and using both the spiritual senses and the spiritual disciplines.<sup>2</sup> Although I have read much about the spiritual senses, I have found very little in the way of naming or defining them. The opposite is true in regard to the spiritual disciplines. Both the spiritual senses and the spiritual disciplines need to work together to give us spiritual and moral insight, and guidance. These are the tools that will enable us to separate the light from the darkness.

Finally, I intend to examine some areas of moral concern. The areas I have chosen are marriage, race relations, economics, class or status, political organization, war and revolution, and the church. My purpose is not to cover every moral issue, but to illustrate how to proceed in making moral and ethical decisions. In most cases, I will start with Scripture and then proceed to tradition, reason, and experience to evaluate my conclusions.

I have decided not to take on medical ethics. It's a subject that deserves a book of its own, but I have included some questions that must be considered in an Appendix. My purpose is to get at the heart of how we make ethical decisions, not to make them for you. Your comments, questions, and criticisms are welcome

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<sup>1</sup> See Leslie D. Weatherhead, *The Will of God* (Nashville: Abingdon Press), 1972.

<sup>2</sup> See my books, *Our Spiritual Senses*, and *Our Spiritual Disciplines* for a more detailed description of the spiritual senses and disciplines.

# 1. DEFINING ETHICS

*Action is the acid test of value.  
How you use your time and your money  
will give you an accurate idea of where your values really lie.<sup>1</sup>*

**Edward Steven**

## **The Twofold Purpose for Studying Ethics**

There are two reasons why the study of ethics is important. The first of those reasons is to gain insight into the meaning of the moral choices we make. Socrates, for example, said, “The unexamined life is not worth living.” Our purpose is to discover the meaning of life. In order to do this we must inquire into what is involved in human freedom and responsibility as it relates to other persons, and God.<sup>2</sup>

The second reason why we study ethics is to make our conduct consistent with the moral standards we profess. Not all moral standards are relative and subjective. Some are ultimate and objective and stand in judgment of human behavior. Our purpose is to make what we say we believe consistent with what we do, both as individuals and as society. This gives wholeness and integrity to our moral life.

## **The Presuppositions of Ethics**

The study of ethics presupposes that we are both *free* and *responsible* beings. Without freedom, the concept of choice would be meaningless. If a person is not accountable for choices and decisions, then they have no ethical significance. The consequences of our moral decisions come to us both in the present and in the future. Either *society* or *God* makes us accountable and holds us responsible.

## **Ethics and the Social Sciences**

Ethics is concerned with the evaluation of human behavior in terms of certain standards of right and wrong, good and evil. The Social Sciences, especially Psychology and Sociology, are concerned primarily with a description of human behavior. One example might be given in relation to truth-telling. The Social Sciences would ask, “How many

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Steven, *The Morals Game* (New York: Paulist Press, 1974), p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> At this point I’m assuming that most of us believe in God. If we don’t believe in God, then we have to relate human freedom and responsibility to our ultimate concern.

people tell the truth?” Ethics would ask, “Ought people *always* to tell the truth?” If we were using truth-telling as an example of what people do with their tax returns, the Social Sciences would ask how many people tell the truth in reference to the income tax laws when they fill out their tax returns. They would accept the current laws and would not ask questions about whether those laws are fair. Ethics evaluates the fairness of the laws and asks how they might be changed. If ethics considers the present laws unjust, then it has the further problem of how to go about changing them and what should be done in the meantime.

### **Defining Ethics**

*Ethics is the Study of Human Behavior (Conduct)  
in Relation to a Standard*

There are many ways to define ethics. Emil Brunner says: “Ethics is the science of behavior in accordance with a standard.”<sup>1</sup> Ethics is therefore the study of the relationship between human behavior (conduct) and the standards used to determine what human behavior “is” and what it “ought to be.” In order to discover what behavior ought to be, one must also study the standards used to determine what might be called proper moral behavior.

Generally, moral behavior is defined on the basis of *reason*, *custom*, or *law*. One rarely chooses only one of these standards for determining behavior, for they are dependent upon one another. At first, behavior may depend upon reason, but later it may also depend upon custom, and is frequently then made into a law. Some people’s behavior may depend entirely upon law or custom, while others may insist upon determining their behavior solely from reason, even when it contradicts laws and customs.

Faith is the starting point for ethical reflection. Faith is reliance on some reality, value, power, or being. Everyone has some kind of faith. “Our falsified and inauthentic ways of dealing with our fellow men,” says Juan Luis Segundo, “are allied to our falsifications of the idea of God. Our unjust society and our perverted idea of God are in close and terrible alliance.” Tillich defines faith as having an “ultimate concern.”

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<sup>1</sup> Emil Brunner, *The Divine Imperative*, p. 82. E. Clinton Gardner, my teacher in Ethics, defined Ethics as follows: “Ethics is the study of human conduct insofar as it may be judged to be right or wrong, good or evil.” While I agree with Gardner, I define ethics as follows: “Ethics is the study of the standards of human behavior and moral conduct. It is a comparison of ‘what is’ with ‘what ought to be’ in human behavior.”



For the Hedonist, that concern is pleasure. For the Marxist, that concern is a particular social order. For the humanist, that concern is the sacredness of life. For the Christian, that concern is the Will of God. All moral behavior is related to one's faith, or ultimate concern.

We all use some kind of standard to arrive at proper moral behavior. In addition to reason, custom, and law, there are also feelings, conscience, and revelation. We can all believe in God and still choose different standards by which we arrive at the Will of God. If we choose different standards, our behavior could be quite different. This is why Jews, Christians, and Muslims can all believe in the same God, but choose quite different forms of behavior as expressions of their faith.

### **Ethics is the Study of Motives, Goals, and Actions**

We generally think that ethics is primarily concerned with human actions, and only secondarily concerned with motives and goals; but actually ethics is concerned with all three, and realizes that they cannot be separated.

There are three major types of ethics: the ethic of *obligation*, the ethic of *aspiration*, and the ethic of *human need*. The ethic of obligation is primarily concerned with the ethical subject, which means that it deals with motives and intentions. It has frequently been called legal ethics. It starts out with the question, "What is right?" or "What is the law?" Once one distinguishes right from wrong, the conclusion is made into a law for moral guidance. One merely has to obey the law in order to be ethical or moral. Immanuel Kant made this position popular in his writings in which he talks about the categorical imperative. What is important for Kant is not the result of moral behavior, but the motive or intention. He is concerned with what is right, even though what is right may not turn out to be what is good. An example of how the ethic of obligation can break down can be given from the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. In this kind of ethics one is obligated to tell the truth, but telling the truth does not always lead to the good. Bonhoeffer, for example, insists that telling the truth involves saying the right word to the right person. Some people, such as Hitler, may not deserve to hear the truth. In such a case, one is not obligated to tell the truth.

The second major type of ethics is called the ethic of aspiration, which deals primarily with the goal of moral conduct and thus the ethical object. Here one is concerned with not only the end or goal, but also with the result of one's behavior. This position aims at developing principles rather than laws, and these principles are to guide behavior. One begins with the question: "What is the good?" Aristotle is gener-

ally associated with this position, and he defines the goal or the good as “happiness.” All moral conduct is determined by that which contributes to human happiness. In Christian Ethics, the good is not “happiness,” but “holiness.” In Leviticus 19:2, God speaks through Moses to the people: “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.” Holiness involves humility, obedience, and love. Jesus breaks the Sabbath law on several occasions to show compassion to people. This is what holy people do. While happiness is never their goal, happiness is always the fruit of their holiness.

The third major type of ethics is called the ethic of human need. Some have called it the ethic of human responsibility. In this kind of ethic, the question is asked, “What is the human need in a particular situation? We do not ask about the law of right or even about the principle of goodness, but rather: “What can (or ought) I do to help?” If an evil ruler oppresses people, I might have to violate the law and my principles of goodness in order to help put an end to the oppression. If I kill the ruler, I’m not acting according to the principle of love, even though I might be acting with love to the people who have been oppressed.

### **Ethics is the Study of Personal and Social Behavior**

These two types of behavior can hardly be separated since they affect one another, but for the sake of understanding, we shall separate them. The study of personal behavior is generally called “personal ethics” and the study of behavior that affects the community of persons is called “social ethics.” As we move into a definition of Christian Ethics, the distinction between personal and social ethics will become even more clear.

## **Christian Ethics**

### **The Dependence of Christian Ethics on Theology**

Just as there are different kinds of ethics, such as philosophical, or religious; there are also different kinds of Christian Ethics. They all depend upon one’s theological position. Some of the most popular definitions given to Christian Ethics are as follows: Emil Brunner defines Christian Ethics as “...the science of human conduct as it is determined by Divine Conduct.” Karl Barth says that Christian Ethics is doing what God commands. According to Paul Lehmann, “Christian Ethics is koinonia Ethics.” Paul Ramsey writes, “Christian morality means extending the life of Jesus by imitating him in our lives.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer defines Christian ethics by calling it “the conformation of man with Jesus Christ.” Jürgen Moltmann reveals his own the-

ology in his definition, when he says: “Christian ethics is the forward moving, evolutionary and revolutionary initiative for the overcoming of man’s bodily predicament and the plight of injustice.”

While there are many ways of defining Christian Ethics, one can assume in Christian Ethics that “personal” and “social” behavior is supposed to be guided by the “life” and “teaching” of Jesus Christ. While Philosophical Ethics uses “reason” as the basis for making moral decisions affecting behavior, Christianity uses “reason” only as it is guided by “revelation” and “Christian Faith.”<sup>1</sup>

This means that Christian Ethics is based upon Christian Theology, and that is why Paul Ramsey is right when he says: “The first thing to be said concerning Christian Ethics is that it cannot be separated from its religious foundation.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Below is a short list of Christians who have attempted to define Christian Ethics:

**Emil Brunner:** “Christian Ethics is the science of human conduct as it is determined by Divine conduct.”

**Karl Barth:** “Christian Ethics is doing what God commands. Ethical conduct is based upon Jesus Christ’s command.”

**Dietrich Bonhoeffer:** Christian Ethics is the “conformation of man” with Jesus Christ. To be conformed with the Incarnate One means to have freedom to be the man one really is. God confirms our manhood by becoming man himself. “A man becomes man because God became man.”

**Paul Lehmann:** “Christian Ethics is koinonia ethics.” “It is from and in the koinonia that we get the answer to the question: ‘What am I, as a believer in Jesus Christ and as a member of his church, to do?’ The answer is the ‘Will of God’ which can be defined as ‘making and keeping human life human.’”

**Paul Ramsey:** Christian Ethics stems from the divinity of Christ. It does not mean power and glory, but humility and servitude. It means the “imitation of Christ.” “Christian morality means extending the life of Jesus by imitating him in our lives....”

**Jürgen Moltmann.** Moltmann does not distinguish between theology and ethics, and therefore is not concerned with building an ethical framework. He reduces ethics to the “ethical demand.” Ethics is the marrow of theology. The ethical demand is to accept one’s self and take responsibility for the world.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Ramsey, *Basic Christian Ethics* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1950), p. 1.

## **The Twofold Concern of Christian Ethics**

Christian Ethics has a twofold concern which it shares with other kinds of ethics, but Christian Ethics differ in the response to this concern. These two concerns can be formulated into two basic questions.

### *1. How do we make moral choices?*

There are many ways in which we make moral choices which determine behavior, and some of the most common are: (1) pleasure, (2) reason, (3) feelings, (4) culture, (5) conscience, and (6) revelation. Several of these may be involved in any particular moral decision, but the one that is always included in Christian Ethics is “revelation.” Revelation refers to the inspiration one receives from God through Christ, and this inspiration is generally thought to come to human beings through the scriptures, but not in the sense that scripture is made up of laws. The heart and soul of the Biblical message is God himself.

### *2. What is the nature of the moral life?*

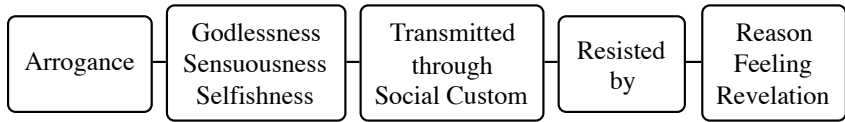
Christian Ethics does not assume that human beings are morally healthy, and that they only need knowledge in order to do the right thing. Christian Ethics assumes that human beings are morally ill and need to be made well before they can act as moral human beings should act. It assumes that human beings are not what they ought to be, and therefore, we must deal with two parts of this question.

## **Human Beings are Sinners**

There are a great many words used to describe human beings as sinners. The word “sin” essentially means “missing the mark.” Some of the other words used to describe this human characteristic are “rebellion, hostility, and alienation.” To be alienated means to be separated from someone. For Christians, sin means that people are separated from God and their neighbors. Moreover, sin is passed on from generation to generation through social customs. Human beings submit to this sin, or they may try to resist it. When they do attempt to resist sin, they generally do so with the aid of (1) feelings, (2) reason, or (3) revelation.

Sin is usually defined by the word “arrogance.” Arrogance is the basic sin, from which all other sins are derived. Sin generally manifests itself in three forms. There is the sin against God, which is called godlessness. There is the sin against oneself, which is called sensuousness; and there is the sin against one’s neighbor, which is called selfishness. All three of these sins are derived from the basic sin, which is arrogance. All of these types of sin may be passed on from generation to

generation through social custom, and the problem of Christian Ethics is to discover ways of resisting this.



### **Human Beings ought to be Reconciled**

Christian Ethics knows that reconciliation means more than making people good, and that agrees with Luther when he says: "...good works do not make a good man but a good man produces good works." Before people are capable of living the moral life, they must first be brought into relationship with God. Philosophical Ethics might say that people only need to be reunited with their neighbors, but Christian Ethics usually sees it necessary for people to be reconciled with God. Some people would even say that it is necessary for people to be reconciled with God before they can be reconciled with their neighbors. Other Christians would not agree, and would maintain that people can only be reconciled with God as they are reconciled first with their neighbors. At any rate the Gospel declares that God is willing to forgive and that he has made reconciliation possible. How this is done is the task of theology. To better understand the task of ethics, let us now examine a typology of ethics.

### **A Typology of Ethics**

H. Richard Niebuhr suggests a typology that tries to answer the ethical question: "What shall I do?" He says that we usually try to answer this question in one of three ways.<sup>1</sup>

#### *1. Teleology*

The person who tries to answer the question through teleology is called "man-the-maker." Such a person asks, "What is my goal or ideal?" Everything is subordinated to what is called "the highest good." Rules may be used, but they are only a means to an end. What is most important is the result of one's action. One does whatever aims at the desired goal. The consequence of the action is most important.

#### *2. Deontology*

The person who tries to answer the question through deontology is called "the good citizen." Such a person always begins by asking,

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<sup>1</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self*, pp. 47-68.

“What is the law?” The primary concern is for what is right, no matter what may happen to the good. Only the right is good, and one cannot relate the right to a future ideal. The future result of one’s action is not as important as doing the right thing in the present. Therefore one does whatever seems right, and the law determines what is right.

### 3. Responsibility

The person who tries to answer the question through being responsible is called “the responsible person.” Such a person always begins by asking, “What is fitting?” or “What is going on?” The concern is with both the “good” and the “right,” for God is active in the world promoting the “good” and the “right.” Therefore what is “good” and “right” is defined by divine activity. Human beings should be ready to disregard both principles and laws in order to cooperate with God’s activity in the world. In this kind of ethic we must act upon what we *believe* God is doing, and must be done, in the world. This is the only responsible way of responding to God.

One might well ask, “How does one know what God is doing?” This is the task of Theology. In the Christian Faith, we look to the teachings and work of Jesus, whom we believe is the revelation of how God acts, and wants us to act, in the world. Jesus is the image of God, and we are not to make him in our own image. The task of Theology and Ethics is to discern God’s activity in the world so that we can act responsibly.

### Conclusions

We cannot separate moral conduct and behavior from our Christian faith. The foundation for Christian behavior is found in the life and teachings of Jesus. He is our revelation from God. The heart of his teachings is the Great Commandment, which consists of two commandments.<sup>1</sup>

Christian Ethics can always be reduced to these two basic commandments: “...you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” This is the first commandment. The second is: “...You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” One loves God and the neighbor, however, only if one also knows himself or herself loved. This was done in Jesus Christ. Love for God becomes the primary task of theol-

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<sup>1</sup> See Mark 12:29-31 and its parallel passages in Matthew 22:37-40 and Luke 10:27.

ogy, and love for the neighbor becomes the primary task of ethics. The two disciplines are intertwined and inseparable.

Christians know that their conduct is not the same as Jesus. This is due to sin, defined in two ways: arrogance and selfishness (sin of commission), and hopelessness and despair (sin of omission). We pass these illnesses on to others by means of our culture and the society in which we live. In the end we are unable to make “what is” coincide with “what ought to be.” Nevertheless, this is the task of ethics.

When we ask what we shall do, we are faced with three options, the Law, Principles, or Divine Activity. We will not always be consistent in the option that we choose. We will also choose different options under different circumstances.

| <b>What Shall I Do?</b> |            |                 |
|-------------------------|------------|-----------------|
| The Law                 | Principles | Divine Activity |
| The Right               | The Good   | The Loving Act  |
| Deontology              | Teleology  | Responsibility  |





## **2. BIBLICAL ETHICS**

*One must read the Bible theologically before reading it morally.*

**James Sanders**

### **The Nature of Biblical Ethics**

The Bible is the sourcebook for Christian Ethics. Old Testament Ethics is the seedbed or soil for New Testament Ethics. The New Testament builds on the Old Testament. There are some very diverse teachings in the Bible, but there are also some recurrent themes and signs of progression.

#### *1. Biblical Ethics is God-Centered*

The first theme of Biblical Ethics is that it is theocentric. The focal point of Biblical morality is God. This gives Biblical Ethics its unifying center. It is not nature, human beings, or some social group. All values and duties are grounded in our relationship to God as the source of our existence. All human beings are created by him and loved by him; therefore, he alone is sovereign over all.

The Bible talks about his coming Kingdom from beginning to end. We do not decide whether or not we would like to seek his Kingdom, nor does he give us the opportunity to vote for it. He confronts us with it and expects us to respond affirmatively to it. He seeks people who will respond and he begins with the poor and oppressed of this world.

#### *2. Biblical Ethics Consists of Commandments*

The second theme of Biblical Ethics is that it operates in the imperative mood, that is, it consists of commandments. This is true for both the Old and New Testaments. God's Will is described in terms of commandments. There are several summaries of these commandments. The commandments given through Moses can be found in Exodus 20:2-17 and Deuteronomy 5:6-21, and the commandments of Jesus can be found in Matthew 22:37-40; Mark 12:29-31; and Luke 10:27.

Preceding God's giving of the commandments is his gift of grace and love. Because God created, loved, and liberated his people, he expects them to enter into covenant with him. Obedience of his laws indicate loyalty to God and his covenant. Disregard for his commandments indicate disloyalty. In Biblical Ethics faith and morality are integrated.

### *3. Biblical Ethics is Concerned with Human Need*

The major concern of Biblical Ethics is with persons and the communities in which they live rather than with abstract laws, rules, or even ideals. The latter are important only as they relate to the needs of people and their life together in community.

There is a strong emphasis on justice in the Bible, which is explicit in the Old Testament and implicit in the New Testament. Micah expresses it best of all when he points out that we are to be concerned with justice, kindness, and humble fellowship with God.<sup>1</sup>

This concern with human need can be seen in the way in which Biblical Morality has progressed through the years. Just a few examples should show this progression: the Sabbath law; the love for the neighbor, and the law of retribution. Jesus was accused of violating the above laws, but he insists that he came to fulfill them.<sup>2</sup>

#### **The Problems of a Biblical Ethic**

##### *1. In The Jewish Scriptures*

In ancient Israel the fundamental religious and ethical obligations were codified in 613 laws.<sup>3</sup> The Ten Commandments are usually thought of as a reduction of at least the ethical obligations into a few rules that can be remembered. Since they are also concerned with one's relationship with God, they are not only dealing with the ethical obligations towards the neighbor. Separation of faith and ethics is not even considered a possibility. The Ten Commandments are recorded in Exodus 20:2-17 and Deuteronomy 5:6-21.<sup>4</sup>

##### *A. Laws about God*

1. You Shall have no other gods before me!
2. You shall not make for yourself a graven image!
3. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain!

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<sup>1</sup> Micah 6:8 (NRSV)

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 5:17

<sup>3</sup> Paul Ramsey, *Basic Christian Ethics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), p. 47. Old Testament Law is usually associated with deontological ethics.

<sup>4</sup> Waldo Beach and H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christian Ethics* (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1955), pp. 14-15.

4. Remember the Sabbath Day!

*B. Laws about the Self and the Neighbor*

5. Honor your father and your mother!
6. You shall not kill! [murder]!
7. You shall not commit adultery!
8. You shall not steal!
9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor!
10. You shall not covet anything that is your neighbor's!

There are some exceptions to pure legalism in the Old Testament. One of the most interesting exceptions to this emerges with Amos. Amos' ethics begin with a consideration of God's nature and activity. One does not decide what to do on the basis of laws or ideals; rather, one makes such decisions on the basis of one's relationship to the living God. Amos, a sheep farmer, went to Bethel, the center of Jewish religion, and criticized the religious people of his day for separating morality from their relationship with God. He called them not to obey laws or ideals; rather, he called them to obey the living God and to do justice to the poor.<sup>1</sup>

*2. In The Christian Scriptures*

In the New Testament there is no single Christian Ethic. We have to examine Christian Ethics in regard to what it meant for Jesus, Paul, and the early New Testament Church.

*A. The Ethics of Jesus*

The essence of Jesus' ethical teaching can be narrowed down to two aspects of his teachings, and they are *The Sermon on the Mount* and *The Great Commandment*. Let us look first at the Sermon on the Mount.

*The Sermon on the Mount*. Beach and Niebuhr have written, "The Sermon on the Mount, as reported in Matthew 5-7, represents in the briefest form available [of] the essence of the ethical teaching of Jesus."<sup>2</sup> What complicates the Sermon on the Mount is the fact that it was given in the expectation of the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God, and the fact that it was given to the poor and the oppressed. This makes Jesus quite different from Amos. Amos criticized the powerful

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<sup>1</sup> Amos 5:21-24

<sup>2</sup> Waldo Beach and H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christian Ethics*, p. 31.

and the influential, but Jesus taught those who were poor and oppressed.

These teachings of Jesus are very strong. They command non-resistance to the enemy, continual forgiveness, and no divorce under any circumstances. Karl Barth is quite right in saying that this ethic "... is not applicable to the problem of contemporary society nor yet to any conceivable society."<sup>1</sup> Paul Ramsey agrees with Barth on this point and says that Jesus made these statements expecting the near end of the world and the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God. "The sermon on the mount," says Ramsey, "is an eschatological stimulus intended to make men well acquainted with the pure Will of God." "It was never intended to be performed as a new law for the adjudication of neighbor-claims in a settled society. Nevertheless, 'we are able to be transformed by it.'"<sup>2</sup>

If Jesus was wrong about the near end of the world and the coming of the Kingdom of God, does this also make his teachings in the Sermon on the Mount wrong? "No," says Ramsey, "genesis has nothing to do with validity."<sup>3</sup> Ramsey divides the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount into two topics: teachings which are relevant, and teachings which are only relevant when the end is near. Both types are valid and represent the pure Will of God, but the second group of teachings is not applicable in a world which must continue to deal with moral problems without an expectation of the near in-breaking of the Kingdom.<sup>4</sup>

Ramsey places such teachings as those against resistance and divorce in this second group. In the Kingdom of God there will be no resistance nor will there be any divorce, and if the Kingdom of God were about to come within the next few days or months, then we would not have to deal with these problems. However, the Kingdom of God has not come, and so we do have to deal with them in a settled society.

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<sup>1</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1935), p. 51.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Ramsey, *Basic Christian Ethics*, p. 43.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 32-35.

*The Great Commandment.* If the Sermon on the Mount cannot always help us, perhaps the Great Commandment can fill in the gaps. The full text of the Great Commandment can be found in Mark 12:28-31; Matthew 22:35-40; and Luke 10:25-27. It is a summary of the Jewish Law and a combination of Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18.<sup>1</sup> Ramsey agrees that the Great Commandment is needed to complement the Sermon on the Mount, and says: “The central ethical notion or ‘category’ in Christian ethics is ‘obedient love’—the sort of love the gospels describe as ‘love fulfilling the law’ and St. Paul designates as ‘faith that works through love.’”<sup>2</sup>

If Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount cannot be made into a law, what about the Great Commandment? Is this just a summary of all the other commandments, or is this a new law in itself? Are Christians supposed to continue to obey all the other laws as well, or are they only obligated to the Great Commandment? The best way to explain this is to clarify the difference between Jesus and the faithful Jew of his own time. A faithful Jew tried to observe the law very carefully and only departed from it to serve human need, but Jesus tried to serve human need so carefully that he violated some of the most cherished laws. His primary purpose was to serve human need, and if the law did not serve that end, then he felt free to violate it.<sup>3</sup>

### *B. The Ethics of Paul*

While Paul agrees with Jesus that the legal codes of the Old Testament are to be fulfilled by love, there is a striking difference in the way he describes it. Jesus talks about the double-commandment as the fulfillment of the law, but Paul includes the entire law in the second commandment.<sup>4</sup> Hence Paul reduces the law into one commandment. Two examples should suffice:

The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet”; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Romans 13:9, NRSV)

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<sup>1</sup> Waldo Beach and H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christian Ethics*, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Ramsey, *Basic Christian Ethics*, p. xi.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>4</sup> See Matthew 22:37-40.

For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Galatians 5:14, NRSV)

Why does Paul do this? It is not that Paul is against the first commandment. He simply defines it differently. One’s proper response towards God is not love, but faith; and one’s proper response to the neighbor is love. Thus the central ethical principle of the Christian is love towards the neighbor, love as defined in 1 Corinthians 13:1-13. This love is the fruit of faith and cannot be separated from it.

Paul knows that it is not enough to be aware of the law. He says in Romans 7:18-19 (NRSV): “For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.” For Paul the great moral problem is not one of *knowledge* or even *will*, but one of ability to obey the law or to do what ought to be done. He sees that the only way to overcome the problem is through a spiritual transformation. Thus in Romans 12:2 (NRSV) he says confidently:

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the Will of God — what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Paul is convinced that the problem can only be overcome by a new relationship with Jesus Christ. It is not simply a question of knowing and obeying his teachings.

Some of Paul’s converts understood his criticism of the law to be so destructive that they felt under no obligation to the law whatsoever. Thus they said, “We are allowed to do anything.”<sup>1</sup> Paul agrees with them, but warns in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 (NRSV):

Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers — none of these will inherit the kingdom of God.

While Christians may be allowed to do anything, they will only want to do the Will of God. “Do not seek your own advantage,” says Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:24 (NRSV), “but that of the other.” Paul, like Jesus, focuses on the neighbor’s need, even though this may bring him to disobey the law.

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<sup>1</sup> See 1 Corinthians 6:12 and 10:23.

### C. *The Ethics of the Early Church*

When we look at the early Church it almost seems as if they were following a new law, and to some extent, this cannot be denied. They were very insistent that the followers of Christ remain carefully separated from political activity. They refused to take their quarrels to the public courts, to hold public office, to bury their dead in public cemeteries, and to serve in the Roman army. Most important of all, they refused to subscribe to emperor worship.<sup>1</sup> Many of their early ethical convictions were codified into laws. Beach and Niebuhr claim that legalism becomes the strategy for the preservation of any group that is about to lose its original ethical inspiration.<sup>2</sup>

Yet more can be said for the early Church than that. In the writings of the early Church there are four ethical motifs which seem to be fundamental. The first of these is *faith*. Those who called themselves Christians believed in God and trusted him in all things. They believed in one God, the creator of the whole universe, the judge of that creation, and also the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. This virtue, *faith*, was and is the mother of all other virtues. It distinguishes Christians from nonChristians. The second motif is the fruit of faith, and is the central moral commandment—*love*. The third moral quality of the early Christians, the mark toward which all Christians should press, is the fruit of love—*humility*. True Christians are those in the world, who when struck, do not strike back. The fourth ethical motif is personal *purity*. The early Christians saw drunkenness, gluttony, adultery, sensuality, and the display of luxury as stepping stones on the way to death. These things were to be avoided at all costs, and this naturally led to legalism.<sup>3</sup>

The early Christians, however, saw themselves as free of strict obedience to the law. Because of their rigorous self-discipline, others interpreted their moral conduct as being guided by the law, but they could not see their motives for their apparent legalism. Perhaps the writer of the Letter to Diognetus expressed it best, when he said about

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<sup>1</sup> Waldo Beach and H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christian Ethics*, p. 48.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

the early Christians: “They obey the laws that men make, but their lives are better than the laws.”<sup>1</sup>

### Conclusions

We can't avoid the commandments, and yet we don't do very well with them. We break many of them daily. We may not murder anyone, but we do get angry with people. Some of us get angry with God. We may not commit adultery, but even the best of us experiences lust. I know all too many Christians that do commit adultery. It doesn't look as if the commandments are very helpful in motivating moral behavior. Even Jesus set aside the commandment to observe the Sabbath in order to heal a man with a withered hand, but he did this out of compassion.<sup>2</sup>

Whether we're talking about the Ten Commandments or the Great Commandment, they do give guidance. The commandments are fulfilled in loving God and the neighbor as Christ loved us.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>2</sup> See Matthew 12:9-14.

<sup>3</sup> See John 13:34-35.



### 3. THE CHRISTIAN VIRTUES: LOVE AND JUSTICE

*I need justice to exist as a human being,  
but I need love to grow as a human being.*

**Anonymous**

#### **The Primary Virtues**

*Are These Virtues One or Two?*

Emil Brunner insists that there are two virtues. According to him, *love* is personal and deals with one-to-one relationships. Love is *neighbor-centered* and considers persons as individuals. *Justice* is impersonal and deals with institutional relationships. Justice renders persons their “due” but also treats them according to their places within a particular institutional or organizational system.

#### *Christian and NonChristian Virtues*

Aristotle talked about the moral or classical virtues, which are wisdom (prudence), courage (fortitude), self-control (temperance), and justice. These virtues, he suggested, could be known by reason.

Thomas Aquinas added to Aristotle’s virtues what he called the theological virtues, which he named as faith, hope, and love. These, he suggested, could only be known through revelation. He accepted Aristotle’s virtues, but referred to them as “splendid vices.” According to Aquinas, these virtues needed to be transformed by Christian love and reoriented toward God.<sup>1</sup>

#### *The Difference between Christian and NonChristian Virtues*

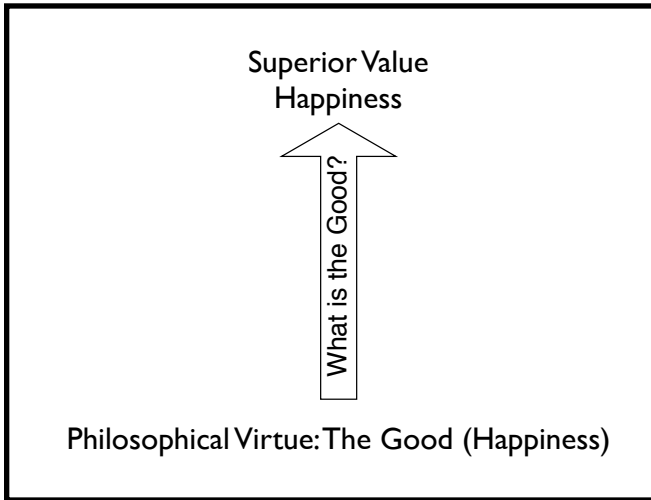
The difference between Christian and philosophical virtues can best be clarified by making a distinction between Christian and philosophical ethics. Two chief questions need to be raised.

What is the good?  
Whose good shall it be?

The first question has been considered the main concern of philosophical ethics, and can be diagrammed as follows:

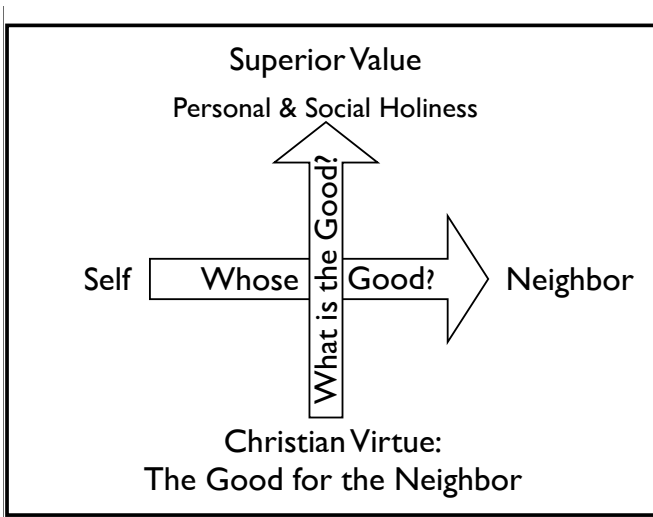
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<sup>1</sup> E Clinton Gardner, *Biblical Faith and Social Ethics* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1960), pp. 13-14.



Philosophical ethics does not leave the second question out completely, but it does not give it the same emphasis as does Christian ethics.

Christian ethics would diagram the relationship between these two questions as follows:



Christians may define the Good as defined by the Philosopher, but the Christian always seeks that good for the sake of the neighbor. It can never be for the Christian alone.

One may elaborate on one or many virtues, and this has been done within Christian Ethics. It is usually accepted that Christianity is primarily concerned with the virtues of love and justice and, so we need

to proceed to define what these two virtues mean. As has been noted about sin; pride (as arrogance) is the basic sin. We can now conclude that love is the primary virtue. There are other virtues, but they need to be transformed by love. This is even true of the virtue we call justice. Christians are concerned with all of the virtues, but love and justice make up the primary Christian virtues.

## **Christian Love**

### *The Love of God*

Christian love is generally thought of in regard to the “love of God” and the “love of the neighbor.” In Mark 12:29-31 (NRSV), Jesus called this the Great Commandment, but he divided it into the first and second commandments:

The first is, “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” The second is this, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

### *The Greek Problem*

Greeks had no difficulty believing that they were to love God. They called this kind of love “aspiring love.” What they had difficulty with was the idea that God could love them, which we might call “initiating love.”

### *Paul's Solution*

In Romans 5:6-8 (NRSV), Paul makes a very radical statement about the love of God:

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

This statement went directly against what the Greeks believed about love. They believed that persons could love God (aspiring love), but that the gods could not lower themselves to loving persons. Love was one-way, upward. Christian love, according to Paul, is defined as Agape Love, that is to say, “love that overflows.” The purpose of such love is fellowship or communion between God and those whom he created.

### *Today's Problem*

We know that God loves us, but we do not know how to love God. There is a tendency today to submerge the first commandment into the second. Support for this can be found in Jesus' new commandment (John 13:34, NRSV) and Paul's emphasis on loving the neighbor (Romans 13:9 and Galatians 5:14, NRSV).

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another.  
Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.

For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment,  
"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

### *Keeping the Commandments Distinct*

There are some contemporary theologians who prefer to maintain Jesus' distinction between the two commandments, and insist that we can love God directly. H. Richard Niebuhr, for example, says:

Love for God and love for the neighbor are two distinct virtues which have no common quality but only a common source. Love for God is adoration of Him as the only true good; it is gratitude and consent to Being. Love for the neighbor, on the other hand, is pitiful rather than adoring; it is giving and forgiving rather than grateful; it suffers for and in [a person's] viciousness and profaneness; it does not consent to accept them as they are, but calls them to repentance.<sup>1</sup>

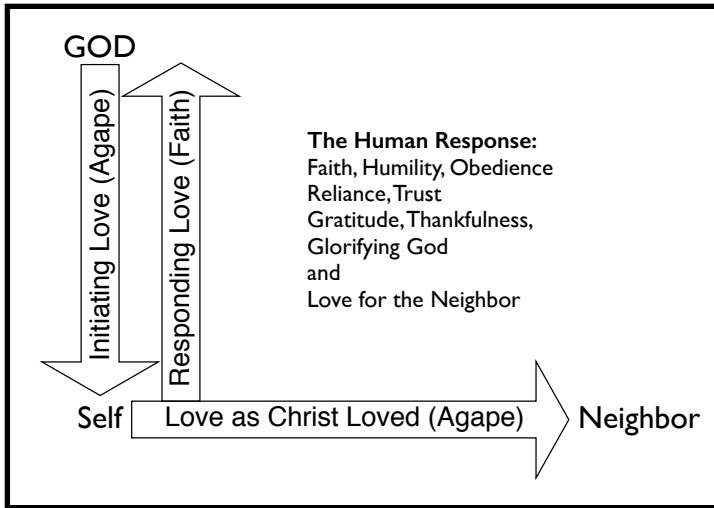
Paul Ramsey also keeps the two commandments distinct and defines our response as follows:

The words "faith," "obedience," "humility," and — to indicate intimacy and warmth—the words "gratitude" and "thankfulness," and—to keep distance between God and man—the expression "to glorify" are preferable, simply or as a cluster, for describing how Christians think of themselves standing in relation to God.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1950), p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Ramsey, *Basic Christian Ethics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), p. 129.



God’s love for us has been defined as Agape Love. Agape love is supposed to be *disinterested love* which is overflowing and does not seek anything for itself. It seems to me that such a definition overstates God’s intention in loving us. *The aim of God’s love to us is always to restore a relationship.* It cannot be simply called disinterested love, for it is concerned that the result be fellowship and communion.

### *The Love of the Neighbor*

Christians are to love their neighbors as they love themselves, or as Jesus says in John 13:34 (NRSV), “as I have loved you.” If we are to love our neighbors in the same way that Christ has loved us, then we too are to love with Agape love.<sup>1</sup> Paul defines such love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (NRSV):

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

In such love it is the *neighbor’s need* that is important. “Do not seek your own advantage, but that of the other.” (1 Corinthians 10:24, NRSV) Christian love always aims at the neighbor’s needs, and it never attempts to use or misuse the neighbor.

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<sup>1</sup> “We love others,” says Major J. Jones, “after we know God’s love for us as agape, and knowing that love directs us to love others.” Major J. Jones, *Christian Ethics for Black Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), p. 112.

Christians do not try to love God through the neighbor. Christians love the neighbor because they have experienced the love of God in Jesus Christ. Because they have experienced love, they are now motivated to love others. “No man ought to ‘use’ himself or his neighbor even for the sake of some supremely desirable end or for the sake of union with God;” says Paul Ramsey, “yet every man ought to ‘treat humanity’ in himself as a means used in his neighbor’s service.”<sup>1</sup>

A significant question is raised by Reinhold Niebuhr in regard to the possibility of Christian love towards the neighbor. He calls it the “impossible-possibility.” He claims that there is no power in such love. Jesus left his power behind in order to love with Agape.<sup>2</sup> Such love may have power, but it does not use it in this world. Thus Agape love always ends up on the cross. It always gets itself crucified.

### **Christian Justice**

We can love persons, but how do we love many persons? How do we love society, or persons in general? This kind of love is expressed through what we call “justice.” “Justice,” says L. Harold DeWolf, “is the structuring and formal shape of love.”<sup>3</sup> If DeWolf is right, then seeking justice is the Christian way of expressing Agape in society. It is also the second great virtue of the Christian Faith.

#### *The Source of Justice*

Paul Ramsey suggests the idea that “...the righteousness (tsedeq) of God provides the measure of true justice for all human justice (mishpat).” “God’s righteousness,” he continues, “becomes the plumb line for measuring the rightness of human relationships.”<sup>4</sup> “...Jesus and the prophets measure what is just and right by the righteousness of God and not by any human standard.”<sup>5</sup> The source of justice can be called the righteousness of God, and Jesus requires that we seek this right-

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<sup>1</sup> Ramsey, *Basic Christian Ethics*, p. 130.

<sup>2</sup> See Philippians 2:5-10.

<sup>3</sup> L. Harold DeWolf, *Teaching Our Faith in God* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1963), p. 92.

<sup>4</sup> Ramsey, *Basic Christian Ethics*, p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

eousness along with his Kingdom which is a symbol of Christian justice.

But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matthew 6:33, NRSV)

Ramsey also maintains that righteousness (*tsedeq*), justice (*mishpat*), and mercy (*chesed*) are not clearly distinguishable in their meaning and are never separable in fact.<sup>1</sup> In the righteousness of God we can perceive both love and justice, and this is why we can say that justice is the formal structure of love in society.

### *Two Types of Justice*

Two basic types of justice have generally been accepted by almost everyone, and they are corrective (penal) justice, and distributive (social) justice. In corrective justice all persons are treated equally before the law. If someone steals something from another, the law is supposed to make sure that the object is compensated for, or returned. In this type of justice one does not ask who has the greatest need, but who has been wronged? Thus the purpose of corrective justice is to repress individual transgression of the law and to maintain equality before the law.

In distributive justice one takes account of the inequality of all persons, and the distribution of goods is made according to needs. Distributive justice has a keen social awareness and aims at the distribution of wealth according to need. The main emphasis does not fall on “equal shares” but rather on an equal opportunity to obtain the social benefits of education, work, health, and social security. According to Acts 2:45 (NRSV), something like this was done in the early church: “...they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.”

If we took distributive justice deeper, we might call it biblical justice. Biblical justice takes into account both physical and spiritual needs, and aims at helping those who are helpless and without power. Such justice is “biased in favor of the helpless and the poor.” Biblical justice raises the question of power. It is not simply concerned with a fair distribution of goods (distributive justice), for that could be done on the basis of paternalism and charity. For biblical justice, the deeper issue lies in the redistribution of power which shapes and controls the

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

destinies of persons and institutions. Those who do not receive corrective and distributive justice, are often at the mercy of those who hold political and economic power and use it for their own advantage. Biblical justice makes a plea for the disadvantaged, and affirms that in the future the tables will be turned. At the same time it demands that the future Kingdom be reflected in today's world.

### *The Principles of Justice*

There are three main principles of justice. The first of these has to do with equality. The principle of equality demands that everyone be given an equal opportunity for an education, a job, medical care, and social security. Equality aims at more equal salaries for workers, and tries to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor. The Socialist and Communist countries have usually emphasized this principle of justice. Because they have found that the easiest way of bringing about equality is through the power of government, many of these countries have yielded to the temptation to use a strong government and in many cases dictatorships.

The second principle is liberty, which means that persons are free to choose certain things for themselves. Instead of government operating most of the farms, shops, and factories, private citizens are free to go into business for themselves. Most Democratic and Capitalistic countries emphasize this principle of liberty, but they also have a greater gap between the rich and the poor. This must be expected because some people are diligent while others are lazy, and the diligent have a right to a higher salary. Most countries emphasizing liberty are afraid of government gaining too much power, particularly if it is centered in a dictatorship. Therefore they try to limit the power of government.

The third principle of justice is order or peace. When too much emphasis is placed on either equality or liberty, there always tends to be a clash which disrupts the peace. While it is necessary to have a certain amount of order to be able to achieve justice, this order cannot be maintained without tension between equality and liberty. If too much emphasis is placed on power and the military in order to maintain an overemphasis on equality, then the result will be tyranny; but if too little emphasis is placed on power in order to maintain an overemphasis on liberty, then the result will be anarchy.<sup>1</sup> True peace depends on a structure of order in which it is possible to achieve this tension between



equality and liberty. When this balance is achieved, we can say that we have an approximate justice. It is doubtful whether any kind of absolute justice is possible within this world. The way we have defined justice might also be acceptable to nonChristians, but Christians can never mean less than this by justice. Christian justice always goes further than is necessary, for Christian justice has Christian love as its spirit, which has a deepening effect upon it.



### Conclusions

How do we deal with this tension between liberty and equality, between the threat of tyranny and anarchy? To avoid both, suggested, Abraham J. Heschel, we might have to fight. He explains *why* from his experiences in World War II:

We have failed to fight for right, for justice, for goodness; as a result we must fight against wrong, against injustice, against evil. We have failed to offer sacrifices on the altar of peace; thus we offered sacrifices on the altar of war.<sup>1</sup>

Martin Luther King, Jr. also emphasized the importance of a balance between justice and love in order to maintain approximate justice.

Power without love is reckless and abusive and love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice. Justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Abraham J. Heschel, *Between God and Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1959), p. 256.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Robert L. Scott and Wayne Brockriede, *The Rhetoric of Black Power* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1969), p. 38.

## 4. CHRIST AND CULTURE

*Do not be conformed to this world,  
but be transformed by the renewing of your minds,  
so that you may discern what is the will of God  
—what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

**Romans 12:2 (NRSV)**

### **Our Purpose**

Kenneth Kirk has written: “The first business of Christian Ethics is to enumerate the main duties of a Christian in normal circumstances.”<sup>1</sup> This is what we intend to do in the rest of this work, but before we can do it, we must be clear about the meaning of Christ and culture. In these so called normal circumstances, will we be controlled primarily by Christ or culture? Most of us would probably answer that we cannot help but be controlled by both Christ and culture. This is true, but will the main emphasis come from our cultural upbringing or from the life and teaching of Jesus Christ? In order to answer this question we must attempt to define what culture is and who Jesus Christ is; then, we must show the relationship or possible relationships between the two.

### **Defining Christ and Culture**

Most of the material which follows in this chapter, has been taken from H. Richard Niebuhr’s book, *Christ and Culture*.<sup>2</sup>

#### *Christ*

It is very difficult to define who Christ is. We might say that he is the *Lord* or that he is the *Messiah*, but what we really want to know here is what he taught and did. Niebuhr begins by lifting up five of his virtues.

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Kirk, *Some Principles of Moral Theology and Their Application* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1921), p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1951). Niebuhr’s book is well organized and the various parts which we have summarized are easily found within the table of contents or the index; therefore, we have not given particular notes with page numbers. For a deeper understanding of the topic, the reader should read Niebuhr’s book.

The first virtue is love, a virtue frequently emphasized by liberalism. Jesus loved God and his neighbor. He knew that God is love, but that love is not God. Jesus did not love “Love” but God. He loved God with his whole heart, soul, mind, and strength. He also loved his neighbor, but he loved his neighbor as God loves, and not simply as one loves oneself.

The second virtue is hope, a virtue emphasized by recent eschatological theology. Jesus hoped for and expected the Kingdom of God to come. He expected the victory of the Kingdom over evil. His whole theology or theory of ethics is derived on the basis of his belief in the end of the world and the coming Kingdom of God. The central focus of his message was that we should repent and accept his coming Kingdom.

A third virtue is faith, which received a special interest in the Protestant Reformation. Jesus believed in God. He did not believe in things about God, but in God himself. Faith is not a thing, but a living relationship. Jesus did not believe in the goodness of persons or in the goodness of the world, but he did trust in the goodness of God. He trusted in God right up to the end. He believed that God is faithful and will forgive our human sinfulness and be merciful.

Humility is the fourth virtue of Jesus, and this virtue was emphasized by monasticism. Although Jesus was humble before God, it cannot be said that he was humble before his peers. He shows little humility before the Pharisees and Sadducees. He called Herod a fox and saw himself as the Messiah and acted with confidence and power. Yet on the other hand, he did wash the disciples’ feet and ate with sinners. He was humble because even though he was rich, he became poor and took upon himself the role of a servant.

The final virtue of Jesus is that of obedience, which has been emphasized by the Christian existentialists.<sup>1</sup> Jesus obeyed God and was characterized best by “radical obedience.” He was never neutral in anything, but always made a definite decision. He always decided between good and evil, and always came out on the side of good. Good was the Will of God, and evil was that which was against God’s Will. Jesus knew the Will of God and obeyed it perfectly.

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<sup>1</sup> Existentialism is a philosophic theory or approach that emphasizes the existence of the individual person as a free and responsible agent determining his or her own development through acts of the will.

How do we summarize who Jesus was and is? We do this, said Niebuhr, by asking and answering two questions. I would like to add a third.

Who is Jesus? Jesus is the Son of God and the Son of Man. He is not half God and half human, but a single person in union with God and in union with man.

What did Jesus do? He revealed God's Will to us. He revealed what it means to be a human being. He showed us what love, hope, faith, humility, and obedience really are.

What is a Christian? A Christian is one who belongs to a community of people who believe in and follow Jesus Christ.

### *Culture*

Defining culture in general terms is difficult, and so all we can do is give some characteristics which are applicable to all cultures. H. Richard Niebuhr mentions at least five of these characteristics.

Culture is created by human beings.<sup>1</sup> Culture does not just happen; people make it happen. People create it. Clear distinctions can be made between nature and culture. A river, for example, is natural; but a canal is cultural. A stone is natural, but an arrowhead is cultural. A tree is natural, but a house is cultural. Culture includes everything made by human beings, such as speech, education, tradition, science, art, philosophy, government, law, and religion.

Culture is created for human beings. Everything we make is intended for a purpose, and the purpose is usually for our own good. Sometimes we may create culture in order to serve God, but the aim of culture, for the most part, is still to serve ourselves. We may build a church in which to worship God, but such buildings are for our own use. God does not need church buildings.

Culture is always social. Wherever persons live together, they create a social culture. Living together creates certain needs, and this causes us to organize ourselves into groups (institutions) in order to fulfill those needs. We build schools, hospitals, and governments in order to make it possible for everyone to live together in peace and harmony.

Culture has many values. Every culture contains different people, with many different aims and goals. They can be categorized as "mate-

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<sup>1</sup> Niebuhr uses the term "man."

rial” and “spiritual” values and goals. All cultures include religion, but not all cultures include Christianity. The most important value for Christianity would be the Kingdom of God. Christians would call this value the “pearl of great price” or “the treasure buried in the field.” Other religions would not. Atheists would accuse Christians of following an illusion, but Christians would accuse atheists of worshiping idols.

Culture conserves itself. We seek “material” and “spiritual” values, and we try to conserve these values for future generations. We must work hard to create culture, and we must work hard to preserve it. “Let education and training lapse for one generation, and the whole grand structure of past achievements falls into ruin.” The problem is that culture transmits both good and evil values, and Christianity must deal with its own relationship to culture. What did Jesus do about human culture? This is an important question for Christians. If we want to follow Jesus, then we have to understand his relationship to culture. The Church and many Christians have considered the proper relationship between Christ and culture in five different ways. We have to decide which of these ways to emphasize. This does not mean that we follow one way and reject all the others. We must remember that there is both good and evil in every culture, and our purpose is to reject that which is evil and accept that which is good.

### **The Relationship between Christ and Culture**

There are five possible relationships between Christ and culture. Each of them can be illustrated from some phase of Church History, but none of these categories is pure. Whenever we place a theologian or movement within a certain category, we only mean to illustrate this category. All that can be said is that this theologian or movement has placed a special emphasis on this relationship between Christ and culture. It does not mean that there are no elements of the other categories in his or her thought.

The main thing to remember is this. Culture has both good and evil in it. Christ accepts culture which is good, but he rejects culture which is evil. Therefore Christ accepts a little of every culture and rejects a little in every culture. Let us now consider the five relationships that have existed between Christ and culture.

#### *1. Christ against Culture*

In this position Christ is considered *King*, and the Christian is faced with an either-or decision. There are only two possibilities open. Christ makes us decide for him and against culture. Human beings are

sinners and everything made by them leads us straight to death. We must decide between Christ and culture. We either follow the customs of the world and reject Christ, or we follow Christ and reject the world. One cannot do both. Christ commands us to separate ourselves from the customs of the world and live according to the pure Will of God. Christ is opposed to everything human, and everything done or made by human beings is against the Kingdom of God. Some of the most important people and movements that represent this position are the early church, the Letter of 1 John, Tertullian, Leo Tolstoy, the Rule of St. Benedict, the Amish, and the Mennonite Churches.

Let us look briefly at the early church. The early Christians refused to join the army or enter politics. One had to kill in the army, and politicians were known to lie and deceive people. Christians could not do these things. The early Christians also refused to send their children to the government schools. They wanted their children to learn about the God of Jesus Christ who is one, but in government schools the children were taught about many gods. They were also taught to worship the Emperor. The same was true of government hospitals. Offerings were made to the Emperor, and Christians opposed these customs. That is why the early church took the position that Christ stands against culture. There was too much evil in culture, and that is why Christ called them to withdraw from culture.

## *2. Christ in Culture*

Christ in culture is the opposite extreme. Here Jesus emerges as the hero of human culture. Jesus becomes the great *teacher* of humanism. His life and teachings are the greatest human achievement. He is part of our culture and he guides culture in the right direction. This position claims that one cannot separate Christ from culture, and so the emphasis is on the harmonization of Christ with culture. Who is capable of separating himself or herself from culture? Even the language we use is a product of culture. The theologians and movements which have placed the most emphasis on this position are Liberalism, Peter Abelard and Albrecht Ritschl.

Modern examples of this position are the national churches, of which the German Christian Church is a prime example. This position became very popular prior to the two world wars. German Christians began to identify their culture with the Kingdom of God. They thought that soon all the evil in culture would be eliminated, and that the Kingdom would be established. Jesus was regarded as a great teacher, who was leading culture in the right direction. Christ is helping us to develop a Christian culture known as the Kingdom of God. We do not

have to wait until the end of the world, for our present culture is helping to develop the Kingdom. Since culture is in the process of becoming perfect, there is no reason for Christ to be against culture. Two world wars broke this optimistic viewpoint into pieces.

### 3. *Christ above Culture*

In this position Jesus and culture are clearly separated, but Jesus is above culture. Jesus is the *Lord* of culture. He came out of culture, but he also came from beyond culture. True culture cannot be achieved without him. We have to obey culture, but culture is not genuine without a Christian interpretation.

Clement of Alexandria and Thomas Aquinas are the two great representatives of this position. Thomas Aquinas is especially remembered for the way in which he placed the Christian virtues of faith, hope, and love above the classical virtues of courage, self-control, wisdom, and justice. This position is an attempt to syncretize culture and Christianity, but it is also an attempt to place culture under the control of Christ. Culture is not rejected; rather, it is placed under the control of Christ. Christ stands above culture and controls it. The Roman Catholic Church has usually emphasized this relationship between Christ and culture.

### 4. *Christ and Culture in Paradox*

This position accepts the conflict between Christ and culture, but lifts Christ up as the *Savior*. We live in a situation of conflict, for we must obey both Christ and culture. There are two authorities which claim our loyalty. We must obey them both, even if they do not agree. We live out our lives in a world of paradox. We are citizens in two worlds, and therefore we live sinfully in this world, trusting that we will be forgiven and justified in the next. This position has some of Christianity's greatest theologians, and cannot be easily written off. We find Paul, Marcion, Luther, and some other reformers placing their primary emphasis on this relationship between Christ and culture.

The paradox is clarified best in the Lutheran movement. We all have two authorities which we must obey, even if they do not agree with one another. We must obey God who is represented by the church, and then we have to obey human authorities (culture), which are represented by government. God may say, "Thou shalt not murder!" and "love your enemies!" but government authorities force us to kill our enemies. How can we obey both God and the State? If we are only protecting ourselves, says Luther, then we must not kill our enemy, we must love the enemy. If we are protecting others, then we must kill the



enemy. We are not to love the enemy more than we love our friends. By killing the enemy we might be sinning against God, but Jesus is our Savior who forgives us. We are citizens of two worlds and we have an obligation to obey both the teachings of Jesus and the culture of the world. Evil is always with us, but Jesus redeems us from it. How do we resolve this problem? “Love God,” says Luther, “and sin boldly.”

### 5. Christ transforms Culture

In this final alternative Jesus is seen as the *Redeemer* of culture. Christ and culture stand in contradiction to one another, but the answer is not to be found in separation from the world, nor in conformity to the world. The answer is not to be found in placing Jesus above culture nor is it to be found in forcing persons to live with the paradox in hope of being saved from it later. The answer lies in transforming culture. Christ converts us within culture and society, but he also converts and changes the culture in which we live. This relationship between Christ and culture has been stressed by the writer of John, Augustine, John Calvin, John Wesley, F.D. Maurice, and H. R. Niebuhr himself.

Most Christian churches fall within one of these last three categories. The symbol here would be prophetic tension. There is neither withdrawal nor conformity; instead, there is an attempt to make the church become an agent of reconciliation or transformation in the midst of an evil culture. The church is to be in the world without being conformed to it. It is sent to proclaim the lordship of Christ over the world and to continue his work of reconciliation in the world.<sup>1</sup>

Why did the early church not attempt to transform the society in which it lived? There are several reasons which will help us to understand why it withdrew from the world. First, it was a minority religion. It did not possess any influence or power by means of which it might bring about change. It was powerless. Secondly, democracy did not exist. The Roman Empire was not based on democracy, and thus, there were no democratic institutions available by means of which the church might try to transform the society. The church only had the option of withdrawing or conforming. Finally, the church expected the Kingdom of God. The church was convinced that God would overthrow evil and establish a new order of righteousness and justice. It was not necessary for the church to do anything, for God would do it all and he would do it soon.

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<sup>1</sup> See 2 Corinthians 5:17-21.

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|---|--|--|--|---|
| <p>Christ is King</p> <p>Christ against Culture</p>   | <p>Christ is Savior</p> <p>Christ in paradox with Culture</p>  | <p>Christ is Lord</p> <p>Christ above Culture</p>  | <p>Christ is Prophet</p> <p>Christ transforms Culture</p>  | <p>Christ is Teacher</p> <p>Christ in Culture</p>   |
| <p><b>Separate</b></p> <p>Too much evil<br/>Christians must choose</p> <p>1 John<br/>Tertullian<br/>Leo Tolstoy<br/>Rule of St. Benedict<br/>Amish<br/>Mennonites</p> | <p><b>Paradox</b></p> <p>Conflict with Culture<br/>Must obey Both</p> <p>Paul<br/>Marcion<br/>Martin Luther<br/>Lutherans<br/>Reformed</p> | <p><b>Syncretize</b></p> <p>Culture needs Interpretation</p> <p>Clement of Alexandria<br/>Thomas Aquinas<br/>Roman Catholics</p> | <p><b>Transform</b></p> <p>Christ in Contradiction<br/>Must transform Culture</p> <p>Augustine<br/>Calvin<br/>Wesley<br/>Baptists<br/>Presbyterians<br/>Methodists</p> | <p><b>Conform</b></p> <p>Cannot separate<br/>Must harmonize</p> <p>Peter Abelard<br/>Albrecht Ritschl<br/>Liberalism<br/>National Churches<br/>German Lutherans</p> |
| <p><b>Christ and Culture</b></p>  |  |  |  |   |

### Conclusions

The position we emphasize in regard to Christ and culture is very important. If we believe Christ is always against culture, then we will always be against human culture. If we believe that culture is developing into the Kingdom of God, then we will accept the culture. If we believe that evil cannot be eliminated from culture, then we will compromise our faith by submitting to some forms of evil. If we believe that culture can be changed by Christ, then we will work to transform culture.

How does one choose between the above five options? One can't accept all of them. I said at the beginning that I was interested in discerning the Intentional and Circumstantial Will of God, but how does one do that? We all read the same Bible, but we don't all come up with the same conclusions. The option one chooses will determine the kind of ethic one tries to apply to the moral issues we encounter in life. I shall now attempt to develop an ethic which can be applied to discern the Will of God. I don't expect to come up with an ethic which will put an end to the above options. The best that I can do is to develop something that works for me. Maybe it will work for you.

The emphasis we accept in regard to the relationship between Christ and culture affects all areas of life. Previously we have said that the primary Christian virtues are Love and Justice, and that Justice is structured Love. If the first business of Christian Ethics is to enumerate God's Intentional Will, then we must turn to an analysis of how we come to our conclusions. We will not all come to the same conclusions, for all of us do not accept the same relationship between Christ and culture, nor do we all define Love and Justice in the same way. In spite of these differences, we can at least chart our way. We can say something about God's Intentional Will, even if we have to admit that there will be many exceptions.

How do we apply God's Intentional Will to the various areas of our life together and what do we call them? Many words have been used to describe them. Emil Brunner called them the "Orders" and distinguished between the "Orders of Creation" and the "Orders of Redemption." Karl Barth called them the "Spheres" and Dietrich Bonhoeffer called them the "Mandates."<sup>1</sup> Admitting that it is difficult to select a word with which everyone can agree, I shall simply name them without calling them anything, but what they are.

About all that I can attempt to do is to describe God's intention in marriage, race, status or class, economics, politics, war and revolution, and the church. In doing this, I shall keep in mind the distinction that Leslie Weatherhead made between the Intentional and Circumstantial Will of God. Before proceeding with this distinction I shall describe my own method for discerning the Intentional Will of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Bonhoeffer's Mandates are usually reduced to four, which are Marriage and the Family, Culture and Vocation, Government and Politics, and the Church.



## 5. THE MORAL LIGHT

*O that you would no longer shut your eyes  
against the broad light which encompasses you on every side.<sup>1</sup>*

**John wesley**

The Bible begins with the creation of light, which is not dependent upon the sun or even the stars. Genesis 1:1-4 says:

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness.

The image of light runs throughout both the Old and New Testaments. The last chapter of the New Testament, Revelation 22:5, concludes, “And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.”

We live in between Genesis and Revelation. How can that divine light awaken us to the Will of God and empower us to live accordingly? The Law is insufficient. It brings knowledge, but it cannot bring spiritual insight. A.W. Tozer put it this way: “The Pharisees looked straight at the Light of the World for three years, but not one ray of light reached their inner beings.” Knowledge of the law (the commandments) is not enough. The inward operation of the Holy Spirit is necessary to discern moral direction. Religious education can bring knowledge, but only the Holy Spirit can give spiritual insight. Both faith and the Spirit are necessary for discerning the Will of God.

### **Paul: The Light from Heaven**

There was one Pharisee, who had been living in the dark, but managed to see the light, and that Pharisee was the Apostle Paul. His story is told three times in the New Testament.<sup>2</sup> He was living in darkness as

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<sup>1</sup> John Wesley, “Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion,” *The Works of John Wesley*, Volume 8, (Third Edition) London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, #78.

<sup>2</sup> Acts 9:1-19; 22:6-16; and 26:9-18

he was breathing threats and murder against the disciples of Jesus. “Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.” He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” He asked, “Who are you, Lord?” The reply came, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.” Paul was then told to go into the city, where he would be told what to do. He was taken to a man named Ananias, who feared him, but baptized him. The light had blinded Paul, but when Ananias laid his hands on him, he regained his sight, was filled with the Holy Spirit, and was baptized. Paul was now ready to discern the Will of God for the rest of his life, but following the Will of God would not be easy. He was going to suffer for Jesus, whom he had been persecuting.

### **Augustine: The Light of Confidence and the Armor of Light**

The image of light was also present in the conversion of Augustine, who had been searching for a philosophy or faith that would satisfy his longing to be set free from his sinful life. He was in Milan at the time and heavily influenced by the preaching of Ambrose. In his *Confessions*, he cried out, “For I felt that I was still the captive of my sins, and in my misery I kept crying ‘How long shall I go on saying “tomorrow, tomorrow”? Why not now? Why not make an end of my ugly sins at this moment?’” Then the miracle happened. Augustine gives the following account of his conversion:

I was asking myself these questions, weeping all the while with the most bitter sorrow in my heart, when all at once I heard the singing voice of a child in a nearby house. Whether it was a boy or girl I cannot say, but again and again it repeated the refrain “Take it and read, take it and read.” At this I looked up, thinking hard whether there was any kind of game in which children used to chant words like these, but I could not remember ever hearing them before. I stemmed my flood of tears and stood up, telling myself that this could only be a divine command to open my book of Scripture and read the first passage on which my eyes would fall.

I hurried back to the place where Alypius was sitting, for when I stood up to move away I had put down the book containing Paul’s Epistles. I seized it and opened it, and in silence I read the first passage on which my eyes fell. *Not in reveling and drunkenness, not in lust and wantonness, not in quarrels and rivalries. Rather, arm yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ; spend no more thought on nature and nature’s appetites.* I had no wish to read more and no need to do so. For in an instant as

I came to the end of the sentence, it was as though the light of confidence flooded into my heart and all the darkness of doubt was dispelled.<sup>1</sup>

The passage that Augustine read came out of Paul's letter to the Romans. He names Romans 13:13-14, but verses 8-14 set the context.

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet"; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law. Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; *let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.*

### **The Starting Point for Christian Ethics: The Moral Light!**

Discerning the Will of God is the starting point for Christian ethics, and that will require a dependence on the Holy Spirit, who alone can transform and guide us. In regard to discerning the Will of God, it was Dietrich Bonhoeffer who warned:

"Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the will of God" (Rom. 12:2). "I pray that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and discernment, that ye may prove the different situations (i.e. what is in each case right)" (Phil, 1:9 and 10; cf. Rom. 2:18). "Walk as children of light...proving what is acceptable unto the Lord (Eph. 5:8ff.)"

The will of God is not a system of rules, which is established from the outset; it is something new and different in each different situation in life, and for this reason a [person] must ever anew examine what the will of God may be.

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<sup>1</sup> Augustine, *Confessions* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1961), pp. 177-178.

The voice of the heart is not to be confused with the will of God, nor is any kind of inspiration or any general principle, for the will of God discloses itself ever anew only to [the person] who proves it ever anew.

In the above quotations Bonhoeffer rejects the view that one can discern the Will of God by intuition without any sort of reflexion. For this reason a person must always be ready to examine anew what the Will of God may be in a particular circumstance. Discerning the Will of God requires a complete inward transformation, a renewing of the mind, and walking as children of light.<sup>1</sup>

What do we do if we have not seen this blinding light, or felt the warm presence of the Holy Spirit? We turn to the Word. “Your word,” says the Psalmist, “is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”<sup>2</sup> In suggesting that we turn to the Word, I do not mean, the Bible (the written Word), but to Jesus, (the Living Word). Of course, we need the Bible to know who Jesus is. The Apostle John describes Jesus as the Word of God, who penetrates the darkness with light. John concludes:

And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.<sup>3</sup>

Jesus’ claims to be that light, which guides. In John 8:12, he says, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” Just prior to Jesus’ ascension, he said to his disciples, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”<sup>4</sup> It is not intuition that illuminates us, but the presence of the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>1</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1970), pp. 37-38.

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 119:105

<sup>3</sup> John 3:19-21

<sup>4</sup> John 20:21-22



## The Law

Jesus did not reject the law. Right after Jesus tells his disciples that they are to be light to the world, he tells them that as he has fulfilled the law, so are they to fulfill the law.

You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.<sup>1</sup>

What does it mean to fulfill the law? It means to obey the intent of the law, not merely the letter of the law.

In addition to the Ten Commandments, there are all those other laws to maintain order, peace, and justice in society. How does the Christian deal with them? It depends on whether or not they are *just* laws. Christians should obey *just* laws, but we are under no obligation to obey *unjust* laws. In *The Letter to Diognetus*, the author wrote about the early Christians and their attitude towards society's laws: "They dwell on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the laws that men make, but their lives are better than the laws. They love all men, but are persecuted by all."<sup>2</sup> Christians face persecution because some of society's laws do not conform to the Intentional Will of God, which is the starting point not only for Christian Ethics, but all ethics. E. Stanley Jones put it as follows:

I find ten laws written into our beings, and as we study them, they turn out to be the very laws of the Kingdom of God. They are these:

1. The universe is a universe of moral consequence.
2. The morally and spiritually fit survive.
3. The Christian way is written in the structure of the universe.

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<sup>1</sup> See Matthew 5:14-20

<sup>2</sup> Waldo Beach and H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christian Ethics* (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1955, p. 68.

4. Humility and obedience are the secret of knowledge and power.
5. An organism expends as much as it receives and no more; therefore receptivity is the first law of life.
6. The second law of life is that you must lose your life to find it again.
7. Greatness comes through service.
8. Love is the fundamental law of human relationships.
9. Life is an eternal growth.
10. All life is lifted by self-sacrifice, by a cross. Wipe, then, the gospel of Jesus from the pages of the New Testament and you will find intimations of it in yourself.<sup>1</sup>

Jones concludes, “The Author of the laws of the Kingdom written in Scripture and the Author of the laws written in us is the same.”<sup>2</sup>

I don’t know why Jones listed the law of love as number eight. I would have listed it as number one. After all, when Jesus was asked to name the greatest of the laws, he replied,

The first is, “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” The second is this, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” There is no other commandment greater than these.<sup>3</sup>

At first, these laws look like principles. The difference between laws and principles is the consequences for breaking laws. Principles are more like goals. There may be consequences for falling short of one’s goal, but it’s not the same as being punished for breaking a law. If Jesus did not reject the law, but came to fulfill the law, then we can’t be antinomian (against the law). Many of the laws and principles do reflect the Will of God, but we cannot discern the Will of God simply by looking at laws and principles.

### **An Ethic of Light**

We begin where God began, with the separation of light from darkness. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, light symbolizes purity and darkness symbolizes evil and sin; and, we are called to walk

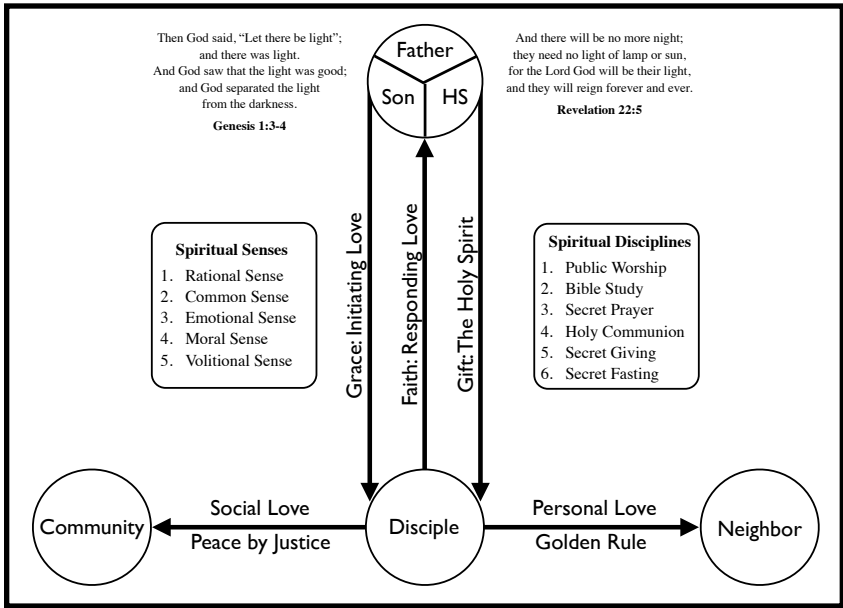
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<sup>1</sup> E. Stanley Jones, *The Way* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), p. 81.

<sup>2</sup> E. Stanley Jones, *The Way* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), p. 198.

<sup>3</sup> Mark 12:29-31

in the light and to avoid the dark. At the end of the Bible, the light extinguishes the darkness completely, and all we have left is light. God is that light, and we are invited to walk in the light on earth as we will in heaven. To make this easier to understand, I have created a graphic to illustrate the various parts of an ethic of light.



1. *The Relationship between God and the Disciple.* In the graphic above, I have identified God as a Trinity. The first arrow pointing down runs from God the Son to the Disciple below. This arrow symbolizes the initiating love of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. Since we don't earn this initiating love, I would prefer to call it "Grace." We recognize this grace through our spiritual senses, which have been built into us. They are gifts of creation, and they enable us to see the light, who is Jesus Christ the Son.<sup>1</sup> Through Him, and the spiritual senses, we come to an awareness of the Intentional Will of God.

The arrow pointing up to God, from the middle circle named "Disciple," symbolizes the response of faith for the gift of "Grace." This is our response to love God with our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

<sup>1</sup> James T. Reuteler, *Our Spiritual Senses* (Aurora: Covenant Bible Studies, 2010), pp. 1-81. The five spiritual senses mentioned above are defined in this book.

The arrow on the right, pointing down from the Holy Spirit to the Disciple, symbolizes the Spiritual Gifts given to those who respond in faith. The New Testament names a number of Spiritual Gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4:11-16. C. Peter Wagner lists twenty-seven Spiritual Gifts in his book, *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow*.<sup>1</sup> No one receives them all, but everyone receives at least one, and the purpose for receiving them is to build up the community of faith and to shine the light in the dark places of the world. The task is to help one another recognize our Spiritual Gift, or Gifts. Spiritual Disciplines are necessary for this task, and so I've listed six Spiritual Disciplines.<sup>2</sup> There may be more, but these have been helpful to me.

1. Public Worship
2. Bible Study
3. Secret Prayer
4. Holy Communion
5. Secret Giving
6. Secret Fasting

2. *The relationship between the Disciple and the Neighbor.* Jesus pointed out that the greatest commandment is to love God, but then he indicates that the second greatest commandment is to love one's neighbor. The moment one responds in love to God, is the moment that the process of sanctification begins. Another word for sanctification is perfect love, which should be understood in the Greek sense, where perfection is defined in terms of process and growth. We usually think of it in the Latin sense, where it implies a finished and complete state of attainment. Sanctification or perfect loves means that we are turning away from the darkness and focusing on the light. 1 John 2:8 illustrates the process:

Yet I am writing you a new commandment that is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. Whoever says, "I am in the light," while hating a brother or sisters, is still in the darkness. Whoever loves a brother or sister lives in the light, and in such a person there is no cause for stumbling.

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<sup>1</sup> C. Peter Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow* (Ventura: Regal Books, 1979).

<sup>2</sup> James T. Reuteler, *Our Spiritual Disciplines* (Aurora: Covenant Bible Studies, 2012).

As we grow in grace, moving toward the light we leave the darkness behind. This is why Jesus commands us to love even the enemy. In Matthew 5:43-45. Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven.” How do we love our enemy? It’s not so difficult. Just put the Golden Rule into practice. The Golden Rule is given by Jesus in Matthew 7:12: “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.” In doing this we fulfill the intent of the law.

*3. The Relationship between the Disciple and the Community.* The Holy Spirit fell on a community of about 120 persons in the Upper Room. No one had to tell the disciples to love the community. As soon as they saw unfulfilled needs in the community, they responded. In Acts 2:44-45, we read of their compassion: “All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.” There are, of course, critics of this display of compassion. They suggest that it was a form of socialism, some even say Communism, which was doomed to fail. In Acts 6 the problem of the Hellenist and Hebrew widows arises, and they solve the problem through division of labor. Here we have an example of recognizing one another’s Spiritual Gifts and putting them to use. Seven men in good standing and full of the Spirit and of wisdom were chosen to wait on tables. This freed the Apostles to dedicate themselves to prayer and preaching the Gospel.<sup>1</sup>

### **Seeing the Light in the Persecuted Body of Christ**

Paul saw the light as he was persecuting the Church. Seeing the light should have been easy for Paul. He was a Pharisee, and he should have recognized the light from heaven; but, it was not until he started persecuting the Church, that the light from heaven blinded him. What Paul discovered was that the Church was the body of Christ. In persecuting the Church he was persecuting Christ himself. At the time, Paul had no idea that he was persecuting Christ; rather, he thought that he was doing the Will of God.

Augustine knew that he was not doing the Will of God. It wasn’t until he heard the voice of a child directing him to pick up and read the New Testament, that the light penetrated his darkness. When he read

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<sup>1</sup> See Acts 6:2-4

that text in Romans, he was confronted with his own immoral acts. The light penetrated his darkness, letting the Holy Spirit take charge.

### Seeing the Light in the Crucified Christ on the Cross

Neither Paul, nor Augustine, make a direct reference to the cross as being the light that prepared them for their conversions. Paul makes an indirect reference to the cross when he was blinded by the light of the risen Christ. Such an experience enabled him to claim that he was one of Christ's Apostles, untimely born. "Last of all," wrote Paul, "as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God."<sup>1</sup> The indirect reference to the cross was his persecution of the Church, the Body of Christ. "May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ," wrote Paul to the Galatians, "by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything!"<sup>2</sup>

The light of the cross is our moral light because the light that streams from the cross illuminates and transforms us. It changed both Paul and Augustine and countless others. Verses from the following hymns illustrate the power of that light.

In the cross of Christ I glory,  
towering o'er the wrecks of time,  
all the light of sacred story  
gathers round its head sublime.<sup>3</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:8-9

<sup>2</sup> Galatians 6:14-15

<sup>3</sup> John Bowering, "In the Cross of Christ I Glory," *The United Methodist Hymn Book* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989) #295.

Christ, whose glory fills the skies,  
Christ, the true, the only light,  
Sun of Righteousness, arise,  
triumph o'er the shades of night;  
Day-spring from on high be near;  
Day-star, in my heart appear.<sup>1</sup>

At the cross, at the cross, where I first saw the light,  
and the burden of my heart rolled away;  
it was there by faith I received my sight,  
and now I am happy all the day.<sup>2</sup>

I wandered so aimless a life filled with sin.  
I wouldn't let my dear Savior in.  
Then Jesus came like a stranger in the night.  
Praise the Lord I saw the light.

### **Seeing the Light in the Glorified Face of Jesus Christ**

A third way of seeing the light is in the glorified face of Jesus Christ. On the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus gave his closest disciples the opportunity to see this light in himself. The experience is described in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke: “And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white.”<sup>3</sup> The difficulty with this passage is that they are told by Jesus to keep this experience a secret. The reason might be that following Jesus' crucifixion, they would see an even brighter light than this one, and they would be encouraged to proclaim it to the world. This was the most brilliant light ever to shine in our world, but how can we see it? When the resurrected Jesus joined two disciples on the way to Emmaus, he interpreted the Scriptures to them and in the evening shared a meal with them. As he broke bread with them, their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. In reflection on this experience, they said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” The

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Wesley. “Christ, Whose Glory Fills the Skies,” *The United Methodist Hymn Book* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989) #173.

<sup>2</sup> Isaac Watts. “Alas! and Did My Savior Bleed,” *The United Methodist Hymn Book* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989) #359.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 17:1-9; Mark 9:1-10; and Luke 9:28-36

way to see this light in the glorified face of Jesus is to look for it in Scripture and in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

### **The Need for Faith and Reason**

Significant questions remain. How do we know when we have seen the light? What do we do when we interpret the light differently from other interpreters of the light? John Wesley describes the role of faith in seeing, hearing, and tasting God:

Faith, according to the scriptural account, is the *eye* of the new-born soul. Hereby every true believer in God "seeth him who is invisible." Hereby (in a more particular manner, since life and immortality have been brought to light by the gospel) he "seeth the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ;" and "beholdeth what manner of love it is which the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we," who are born of the Spirit, "should be called the sons of God."

It is the *ear* of the soul, whereby a sinner "hears the voice of the Son of God, and lives;" even that voice which alone wakes the dead, "Son, thy sins are forgiven thee."

It is (if I may be allowed the expression) the *palate* of the soul; for hereby a believer "tastes the good word, and the powers of the world to come;" and "hereby he both tastes and sees that God is gracious," yea, "and merciful to him a sinner."

It is the feeling of the soul, whereby a believer perceives, through the "power of the Highest overshadowing him," both the existence and the presence of Him in whom "he lives, moves, and has his being;" and indeed the whole invisible world, the entire system of things eternal. And hereby, in particular, he feels "the love of God shed abroad in his heart."<sup>1</sup>

For Wesley there are two kinds of senses, natural and spiritual. The natural senses do not help us to see the light. It takes the spiritual senses to do that. This is why we should not depend too much, or too little, on reason. Wesley suggests a middle way:

Is not the middle way best? Let reason do all that reason can: Employ it as far as it will go. But, at the same time, acknowledge it is utterly incapable of giving either faith, or hope, or

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<sup>1</sup> John Wesley, (1872). *The Works of John Wesley* (Third Edition., Vol. 8, pp. 4–5). London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room.



love; and, consequently, of producing either real virtue, or substantial happiness. Expect these from a higher source, even from the Father of the spirits of all flesh. Seek and receive them, not as your own acquisition, but as the gift of God.<sup>1</sup>

While reason cannot produce faith, faith can use reason; but the reason that faith uses, must also relate to the spiritual senses. Wesley draws a contrast between reason's dependence on the natural senses and faith's dependence of the spiritual senses.

As you cannot reason concerning colours, if you have no natural sight, because all the ideas received by your other senses are of a different kind; so that neither your hearing, nor any other sense, can supply your want of sight, or furnish your reason in this respect with matter to work upon: So you cannot reason concerning spiritual things, if you have no spiritual sight; because all your ideas received by your outward senses are of a different kind; yea, far more different from those received by faith or internal sensation, than the idea of colour from that of sound.<sup>2</sup>

Reason needs faith in order to discern the Will of God, but faith also needs reason to apply the Will of God to life in this world. After all, we do pray, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Our greatest difficulty lies in the fact that Christians don't always agree on what the Will of God is. In the end, we all must proceed according to the light we have. At the same time, we have to allow others to be guided by their own consciences. acknowledging that God has given us a conscience to guide our behavior. Conscience is one of several spiritual senses.<sup>3</sup> The idea of spiritual senses can certainly be found in Scripture. A few examples should suffice:

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<sup>1</sup> John Wesley, (1872). *The Works of John Wesley* (Third Edition., Vol. 6, p. 360). London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room.

<sup>2</sup> John Wesley, (1872). *The Works of John Wesley* (Third Edition., Vol. 8, pp. 13–14). London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room.

<sup>3</sup> I would suggest the following as making up our spiritual senses: rational, common, emotional, moral, and volitional sense. The natural senses are: sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch.

*O taste and see that the LORD is good;  
happy are those who take refuge in him.*

**Psalm 34:8**

*Let anyone with ears to hear listen!*

**Mark 4:23**

*Let anyone who has an ear  
listen to what the Spirit  
is saying to the churches.*

**Revelation 2:11**

*Look at my hands and my feet;  
see that it is I myself. **Touch** me and see;  
for a ghost does not have flesh and bones  
as you see that I have.*

**Luke 24:39**

There are many more examples. In some of the examples, it is difficult to know whether the text is referring to the natural or spiritual senses. In every case the text calls for spiritual and moral discernment. We are called to see and apply the light.

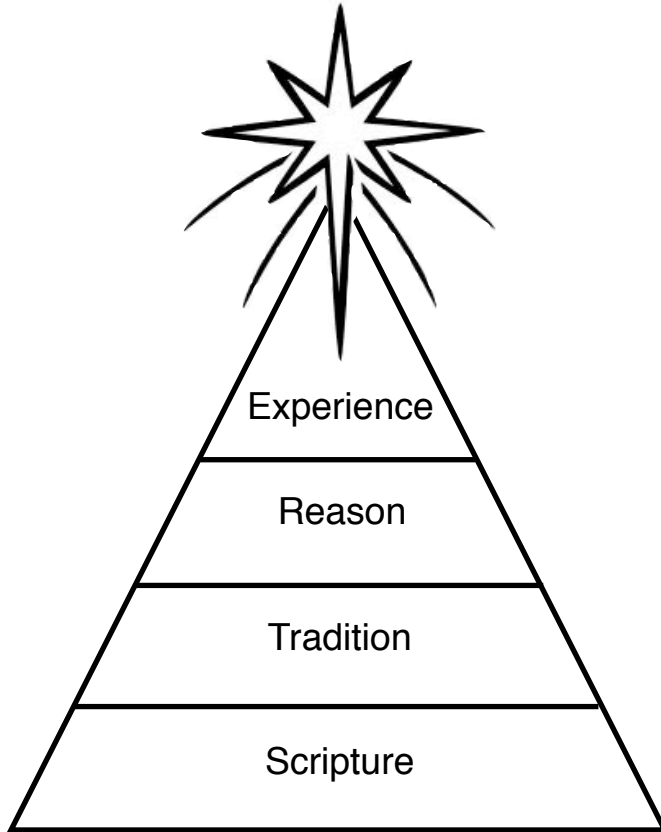
**Applying the Light**

It's not enough to acknowledge that there is a moral light, or even to claim to have seen it. The task that lies ahead is to learn how to apply it. There is a simple method for doing this, but it is actually far more complex than most people realize. Below is a brief outline of the method for applying the light on moral issues:

1. **Scripture:** our authority, fundamental and decisive.
2. **Tradition:** the collective wisdom of the church in interpreting Scripture.
3. **Reason:** the critical discipline used in judging the credibility of all interpretation.
4. **Experience:** to the person what tradition is to the whole Christian community.

Credit for this method has been given to John Wesley, but it was being used long before his time, although he can be given credit for his special emphasis on experience. Albert Outler, who coined the term, "the Wesleyan Quadrilateral," summarizes it as follows:

Tradition, reason, experience, are ways of understanding and interpreting Scripture. But Scripture is central.... We believe in the warm heart and the open mind. When God warms the heart and fills the mind, the result is our third heritage—the evangelistic spirit.



This complex method is more sophisticated than it appears, and that will become clear as I attempt to apply it. It preserves the primacy of Scripture, but it raises the question of how to interpret Scripture. It profits from the wisdom of Tradition, but which Tradition? It accepts the disciplines of critical reason, but reason cannot produce faith and frequently kills it. Reason is not the eye of the soul. That place belongs to faith. Finally, Wesley's emphasis on Christian Experience, gives this method its powerful motivation.

Applying the light with this method requires all of us to be theologians, that is to say that we will need a familiarity with Scripture that is both faithful and critical, plus, an acquaintance with the wisdom of Christian history, both Eastern and Western. In addition to these re-

quirements, we will need a vital, inward assurance of faith that aids us in the interpretation of the Word of God in Scripture. Christian Experience may not add anything to the substance of Christian truth, but it has the power to energize the heart so as to enable the believer to speak and practice the truth in love. All we have to do is to acknowledge the candle of the Lord, or the moral light fixed in our souls for excellent purposes.<sup>1</sup> This is no easy task, but let us begin by applying the moral light to several areas of our lives. The author of the Letter to the Ephesians sums it up:

For once you were darkness,  
but now in the Lord you are light.  
Live as children of light—for the fruit of the light is found  
in all that is good and right and true.  
Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord.  
Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness,  
but instead expose them.  
For it is shameful even to mention  
what such people do secretly;  
but everything exposed by the light becomes visible,  
for everything that becomes visible is light.  
Therefore it says,  
“Sleeper, awake!  
Rise from the dead,  
and Christ will shine on you.”

**Ephesians 5:8-14**

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<sup>1</sup> John Wesley, (1872). *The Works of John Wesley* (Third Edition., Vol. 6, pp. 359–360). London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room.

## 6. MARRIAGE

### **Marriage: The Intentional Will of God Divorce: The Circumstantial Will of God**

*In marriage man and woman become one in the sight of God  
just as Christ becomes one with his Church.*

#### **Dietrich Bonhoeffer based on Ephesians 5:25**

Let us begin with the institution of marriage, and since we consider Scripture to be primary, let us examine the teachings of Jesus and Paul on marriage. In studying the teachings of Jesus and Paul about marriage we must recognize that both of them were single and that their views concerning marriage differ. Nevertheless, it will be helpful to try to understand what they taught about marriage.

#### **The Teachings of Jesus**

The teachings of Jesus about marriage are mostly taken from his condemnation of divorce. They can be summarized into four statements concerning the purpose and permanency of marriage.

*Marriage is not the Main Purpose of One's Life!*

There are other loyalties which are more important than marriage, and that is why Jesus teaches in Matthew 6:33: “strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness.” Seeking the Kingdom of God, according to Jesus, is more important than marriage or even loyalty to our families. It is more important to seek the Kingdom of God than to have a wife, husband, or family. In fact, whoever does the Will of God is part of the family of God.<sup>1</sup> Jesus would not even let a man go home in order to wait for his father to die. Instead he told the man: “Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:60).<sup>2</sup> While Jesus teaches that the main aim of life is to seek the Kingdom of God, this does not mean that marriage and the family are unimportant. It only means that marriage and the family are not the main purposes of one's life.

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<sup>1</sup> See Mark 3:31-35

<sup>2</sup> See also Luke 9:57-62 and Matthew 8:21-22.

### *There is a Divine Intention in Marriage!*

The importance of marriage is emphasized by Jesus when he quotes from Genesis 2:24 in Mark 10:6-8 to establish the divine intention of marriage. Jesus sees the divine intention in marriage going back to the beginning of creation:

But from the beginning of creation, “God made them male and female.” “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” So they are no longer two, but one flesh.

Thus the purpose of marriage is to unite a man and woman into one.

### *Marriage is meant to be Permanent!*

If there is a divine purpose in marriage, then it follows that marriage is to be permanent. This means that divorce cannot be permitted. At least this was the original intent of God when he created men and women. (See Matthew 19:3-12 and Mark 10:9) There are some writers who teach that adultery is a legitimate excuse for divorce, but the teachings of Jesus seem to be against this. In the time of Jesus the punishment for adultery was death. If a person committed adultery, then he or she was to be stoned to death. If death was the punishment, then there was little need for a divorce; although, the death penalty for adultery was seldom used.

One was not to divorce his wife for any reason at all. If one did divorce his wife and she remarried, then she committed adultery. Anyone who married her would also commit adultery. Even the man who put away his wife committed adultery by marrying again.<sup>1</sup> It is only after the husband or wife has died, that the surviving person is allowed to remarry. The resolution to marital problems in the teachings of Jesus is not separation or divorce, but reconciliation. While both persons are still living, reconciliation is always possible. Although marriage is to be permanent in this world, there will not be any marriage in the Kingdom of God.<sup>2</sup>

Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. (Luke 20:34-35)

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<sup>1</sup> See Matthew 5:31-32 and Matthew 19:9

<sup>2</sup> See Luke 20:27-40

### *Adultery is Condemned!*

Jesus not only condemns adultery, but even the thought of it. This is why he says:

You have heard that it was said, “You shall not commit adultery.” But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5:27-28)

In marriage a man and woman become one, and adultery interferes with this relationship. It is because Jesus sees a divine purpose in marriage that he becomes so strict in regard to divorce. It is because the intent of marriage is the oneness of two people, that even lusting for another person becomes adultery. The divine intent of marriage is the bringing of two people into a divine oneness. No one is to separate these two people, whom God has joined together.

### **The Teachings of Paul**

Paul admits that much of his advice is his own, and that it is not a commandment from the Lord. His teachings about marriage and the family are derived from his belief that Jesus will return soon and establish the Kingdom of God, and that in this coming Kingdom, people will not marry. Therefore, it is better not to marry. His teachings about marriage can also be summarized into four brief statements.

#### *Stay Single!*

Paul’s first advice is: “To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain unmarried as I am.” (1 Corinthians 7:8) In other words, “Stay single!” Paul admits that this advice does not come from the Lord, when he says: “I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord’s mercy is trustworthy.” (1 Corinthians 7:25) His main reason for advising people to remain single is his belief in the coming Kingdom of God in which there will be no such thing as marriage. He does clarify the usefulness of the single person to the Church in 1 Corinthians 7:32-34):

I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman and the virgin are anxious about the affairs of the Lord, so that they may be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please her husband.

### *Marriage is not Sinful!*

Although Paul's advice is against marriage, he also says that marriage is not sinful. His advice is that everyone should remain as they are. If one is married, Paul advises, "Stay married." If one is single, he advises, "Remain single." If one cannot remain single, Paul says that it is not sinful to marry. Paul is simply giving advice to help people avoid everyday troubles.

But if you marry, you do not sin, and if a virgin marries, she does not sin. Yet those who marry will experience distress in this life, and I would spare you that. (1 Corinthians 7:28)

The only difficulty Paul finds with marriage is the conflict between two loyalties: the Kingdom of God and the marriage partner. Who is to be served first? The answer is obviously the same as that given by Jesus. We must serve the Kingdom of God first, even above the family or one's wife or husband.

### *Believers Should Not Marry Unbelievers!*

If Christians face problems of loyalty within marriage, the problem is even more acute when a believer marries an unbeliever. Paul's advice here is that believers should not marry unbelievers, mainly because they do not have the most important thing in life in common with one another.

Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship is there between light and darkness? (2 Corinthians 6:14)

However, if one finds oneself married to an unbeliever, the advice Paul gives is not to seek a divorce, but to go on living with that person. This would be the Circumstantial Will of God. One is to set an example before that person and pray for his or her conversion.

To the rest I say — I and not the Lord — that if any believer has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. And if any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. (1 Corinthians 7:12-13)

On the other hand, if the unbeliever does not want to continue in the marriage, Paul's advice is as follows: "...if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so." (1 Corinthians 7:15) The believer should not force the unbeliever to continue in a divided marriage.



### *Don't Marry Again!*

Paul accepts Jesus' teaching about remarriage. If one does get a divorce, he or she is not to marry again until the former partner has died. Paul claims that this is not simply his own advice, but a commandment from the Lord.

To the married I give this command — not I but the Lord — that the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does separate, let her remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife.  
(1 Corinthians 7:10-11)

“A wife is bound,” continues Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:39, “as long as her husband lives. But if the husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, only in the Lord.”

Jesus and Paul agree. Marriage is to last until death. If one seeks a divorce, one cannot marry a second time. Paul advises people not to marry; Jesus gives no advice at all. He only says that the purpose of marriage is to unite two people into one. Two persons become one and they should not be separated.

### **Marriage Today**

There are generally some common teachings accepted by most churches that emerge from the teachings of Jesus and Paul. Answers to four basic questions tend to sum up these similarities and differences.

#### *What is the Purpose of Marriage?*

There are two purposes in marriage. The first of these has to do with procreation (to have children), and is taken from Genesis 1:26-28:

Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

The second purpose of marriage has to do with fellowship and love or becoming one body. This purpose is described in Genesis 2:18-24:

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner." So out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken." Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Thus, marriage has two purposes: that of having children and that of becoming one. Marriage is the work of creation and has the divine intent behind it.

All Christian churches accept the two purposes of marriage, but different churches give them different emphases. The Roman Catholic Church emphasizes having children as of first importance, while the Protestant Churches have emphasized becoming one as the more important of the two purposes. These different emphases cause the Roman Catholic and the Protestant Churches to have different teachings on birth control. Catholics generally reject certain kinds of birth control, while Protestants usually support most means of birth control.

### *Is Gay Marriage Legitimate?*

Gay marriage is a very controversial issue. Since we went to the Old Testament for our definition of marriage, which Jesus used in answering questions about divorce, we must start there. The two clearest statements in the Old Testament that deal with homosexuality can be found in Leviticus. They are as follows:

You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination. (Leviticus 18:22)

If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them. (Leviticus 20:13)

Those who want to affirm gay marriage usually ask why other Old Testament laws aren't taken as seriously as these two laws opposing homosexuality. The law usually quoted is Leviticus 19:19, which states: "... you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed; nor shall you put on a garment made of two different materials." Why do we choose to obey one law and ignore another? After all, Leviticus 20:22 warns: "You shall keep all my statutes and all my ordinances, and observe them, so that the land to which I bring you to settle in may not vomit you out." Before we reject Leviticus as a source for moral laws, it's helpful to note that when Jesus was asked to name the Great Commandment, he included in his answer Leviticus 20:18, which states: "...you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD."

To give a complete answer to why one law might be accepted while another law is rejected, we must move to the New Testament. In Acts 15 the leaders of the Church in Antioch were faced with the critical question. Do Gentiles have to obey the Jewish Law to become Christians? The first Christian Conference was held in Jerusalem to answer this question. James, the leader of the Jerusalem Church, concluded:

I have reached the decision that we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God, but we should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood. (Acts 15:19-20)

This was not only James' decision, but the decision of all who met in that first Christian Conference. Moved by the Holy Spirit, their final decision was,

For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell." (Acts 15:28-29)

What the above means is that Gentiles were obligated to obey the moral law, but not ritual or liturgical laws. This is why Christians can ignore laws on mixed seeds and garments of different materials, but are obligated to obey moral laws on fornication and sexuality.

While the issue of gay marriage and homosexuality never came up during Jesus' brief ministry, Jesus did define marriage in the context of questions about divorce. None of his disciples, with the exception of the Apostle Paul, ever dealt with the issue. Homosexuality, however,

was practiced among the Gentiles. That may explain why it became an issue with Paul; and yet, Paul only deals with the issue twice, once in his letter to the Corinthians and again in his letter to the Romans.

Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-10)

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error. (Romans 1:24-27)

Scripture does not affirm gay marriage or homosexuality. To do that one must appeal to some other source. Since tradition will not be of much help, one would have to appeal to reason, experience, or biology. Could it be that a certain percentage of persons are biologically wired to be gay? That is frequently the claim. If that is the case, gay marriage fulfills the purpose of marriage in regard to fellowship and love, but not in terms of procreation. While couples don't have to procreate, procreation is part of the definition of marriage. Without procreation, humanity would cease to be. If a certain percentage of the population is wired to be gay, the only conclusion that can be drawn is that gay marriage at best is God's Circumstantial Will.

### *Is Polygamy Legitimate?*

Both Jesus and Paul seem to answer this question by saying that monogamy is the divine intention, and both of them quote from Genesis 2:24. Let us look first at what Jesus says in Matthew 19:5-6:

For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh? So they

are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.

Paul's teaching on the subject is very similar and the essence of it can be found in Ephesians 5:31-33:

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church. Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband.

The idea that two are to become one and never be separated seems to imply that monogamy is the Intentional Will of God. Because this implies marriage to one person until death, one could also interpret serial marriage, divorce, and remarriage (while one's spouse is still alive), as violations of the monogamous principle.

Polygamy is more difficult to deal with from the Scriptures than gay marriage. The same argument could be made for polygamy. A certain percentage of people are biologically wired to enter into such marriages. All of the patriarchs in the Old Testament had multiple wives, and there doesn't seem to be any law against it. In the New Testament, there is no outright rejection of polygamy. There is of course the instruction in Titus 1:6 that elders should be blameless and married only once. Since most elders would have been older, this probably means that they shouldn't marry a second time, but it could also be a rejection of polygamy. If a certain percentage of the population is wired for polygamy, I'd have to draw the same conclusion that I did for gay marriage. At best, it would be God's Circumstantial Will.

### *Is Marriage Essential?*

Does one have to get married? The obvious answer is "No," but this does not mean that marriage or celibacy is the best state. Jesus and Paul did not marry, but this does not mean that remaining single is better than getting married. In the past Roman Catholics have viewed celibacy as the higher order, but most Protestants hold celibacy and marriage as being equal. One does not have to get married, but this does not mean that one is more holy because he or she remains single. One cannot give moral value to those who remain single or to those who choose to marry. Both are ordained of God, and each person must choose which he or she desires. One is not better than the other, for it all depends upon one's particular circumstances. The purpose of all persons, whether they marry or not, is to seek first the Kingdom of God

and enter into a personal relationship with God. Both marriage and celibacy take second place to citizenship in the Kingdom of God.

### **Problems Related to Marriage**

Persons who choose to marry also involve themselves in the possibility of additional problems that the single person does not face. Let us consider some of those problems.

#### *Divorce*

We have already discussed the teachings of Jesus and Paul in regard to divorce, and have discovered that both of them considered divorce to be outside the Intentional Will of God. There does remain the question as to whether the Christian should ever resort to divorce. Usually the only justifiable reason for divorce has been given as adultery, but both Jesus and Paul imply that divorce and adultery are not the Intentional Will of God.<sup>1</sup> From their teachings we also become aware of the fact that they teach that divorced persons should not remarry. Most Christian Churches have tried to make a distinction between the guilty and innocent person. The innocent person is then allowed to remarry, while the guilty person is accused of sin. Generally it is safe to say that the Roman Catholic Church has taken divorce and remarriage more seriously than the Protestant Churches; and as a result, Protestant Churches have a higher rate of divorce and remarriage than Catholic Churches. Another way of looking at the problem is to say that Catholic Churches have looked at divorce and remarriage as being outside of the Will of God and Protestant Churches have viewed divorce and remarriage in terms of the Circumstantial Will of God.

#### *Birth Control*

There are two ways of preventing the birth of children. The Roman Catholic Church accepts what has been called the natural method of birth control; while the Protestant Churches usually accept most artificial methods of birth control. The Roman Catholic Church opposes artificial methods because it understands the main purpose of marriage as procreation (to give birth to children). Birth control also means spacing children, but Catholics teach that it is God who should decide when a woman becomes pregnant and still rejects artificial means of birth control. Jesus and Paul say nothing about birth control, and so the entire question is left up to the modern Church. Since the population of the world is growing, it is probably necessary to limit the number of

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<sup>1</sup> See Matthew 5:31-32; 19:9; Mark 10:10-12; and Luke 16:18.

children being born. Protestants are willing to do this with those birth control methods that are morally responsible and scientifically safe. The third world, however, claims that the problem is *not* population growth, which requires population control through birth control methods. The problem is over-consumption on the part of the first world, which requires consumption control. This is why population control is rejected in many third world countries.

### *Abortion*

One method of birth control that is highly controversial, and is opposed by Roman Catholics and many Protestants as well. It is abortion. Many Christians accept it when the physical or mental health of the mother is threatened, in cases of rape or incest, and when the fetus appears to be abnormal.<sup>1</sup> Many who accept abortion for the above reasons might still oppose it simply to get rid of an unwanted child.

One of the important issues in abortion is whether or not it can be defined as murder. This depends upon how one defines the beginning of life, or when one might call the fetus a person. If one defines life by the heart beat, then one must say that life begins on about the twenty-fifth day of pregnancy. This is about the time the mother begins to wonder whether or not she might be pregnant.<sup>2</sup> Another way of determining the beginning of life is the presence of brain activity. The brain begins to be active by the end of the eighth week, the same time as all the essential organ formations are present. All that remains is the development and growth of the baby. Nothing really new is added after this time.<sup>3</sup>

There are those who oppose these kinds of definitions of life. They insist that the fetus is not a person until it is born (respiration) and begins the process of socialization. If respiration is discounted in favor of the cessation of brain activity as a way of defining death, then it will become questionable as to whether respiration can be used as a way of defining life at birth. It is doubtful that socialization can ever be used as a definition of life, for communication (talking) is necessary for true socialization and this does not take place until the child reaches its first

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<sup>1</sup> Clinton Gardner, "The Public Regulation of Abortion," *An Unpublished Essay*, May 3, 1973, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Ramsey, "Feticide/Infanticide Upon Request," *Religion in Life*, 1970, p. 173.

<sup>3</sup> Ramsey, "Feticide/Infanticide Upon Request," p. 174.

year. No one is ready to say that children can be killed up to their first year of life, and so abortion remains a problem that must be dealt with during the time of pregnancy.<sup>1</sup>

Most liberalized abortion laws permit abortion up to twenty-four or twenty-eight weeks (the stage of viability). Medical science usually defines abortion as the expulsion of the fetus prior to the twentieth week (the stage of quickening); and anything that occurs after that would be called a premature birth. Thus if one defines life by the heart beat, the formation of the organs, or the presence of the brain, then abortion following the first month or two would be murder. This would rule out abortion, for a woman would not even know for sure that she was pregnant at this time. People holding these definitions of life might still permit abortion in cases of rape, incest, abnormality, and the threat to the mother's physical or mental health. The unfortunate thing is that the Bible does not clarify any of these problems, and so Christians will continue to disagree on abortion. The crucial definition has to do with the beginning of human existence.<sup>2</sup>

### **Conclusions**

The Kingdom of God is the Intentional Will of God. As long as one puts the Kingdom of God first, marriage or singleness can be considered to be part of the Intentional Will of God. Divorce, gay marriage, polygamy, and abortion can only fall under the Circumstantial Will of God. Since God loves all of his creation, all are invited to put the Kingdom of God first. Sometimes the only thing that's open to us is the Circumstantial Will of God, as we shall see as we proceed.

Jesus never said that discipleship would be easy and that following the Intentional Will of God would be smooth sailing. Sometimes the Intentional Will of God is not even an option for us, and the only way forward is the Circumstantial Will of God. In such times, using our spiritual senses and exercising our spiritual disciplines become necessary as we try to comprehend our moral compass, the Light.

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<sup>1</sup> Ramsey, "Feticide/Infanticide Upon Request," p. 174.

<sup>2</sup> In the Appendices I have listed questions on some of these issues under the topic of Medical Ethics.



## 7. RACE RELATIONS

**Equality: The Intentional Will of God**  
**Tolerance: The Circumstantial Will of God**

*There is no longer Jew or Greek,  
there is no longer slave or free,  
there is no longer male and female;  
for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.*

**Galatians 3:28 (NRSV)**

Racial problems have become serious in recent times. Previously the most serious problems have been over religion, nationalism, and language. These problems are still with us, but serious problems have emerged between the races, the most serious being: the Aryan/Jewish, the Black/White, and the Jewish/Arab problems.

### **The Racial Groups**

Three main groups are usually mentioned, and these are the Cauca-  
soid, Mongoloid, and Negroid. One can also designate these groups  
according to the main continents from which these groups come, which  
would be Europe, Asia, and Africa. This, however, leaves some people  
out of the classification, such as the Native Americans. To which group  
do they belong? Thus some would prefer to refer to the white, yellow,  
brown, and red races of the world.

### **The Nature of Racial and Human Differences**

Scientists have carefully studied all these various racial groups,  
and they have concluded that although there are cultural differences,  
there are no significant biological differences. There are intelligent  
people in every race, but one cannot say that one is intelligent because  
of a particular race. There are lazy people in every race, but laziness is  
not due to one's race. "There is no authentic evidence," wrote E. Clin-  
ton Gardener, "so far as science is concerned that the three major racial  
groups—Mongoloid, Negroid, and Caucasoid—differ either in the av-  
erage or in the range of their innate mental capacities."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> E. Clinton Gardner, *Biblical Ethics and Social Ethics* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1960), p. 352.

Therefore the Intentional Will of God is that all these racial groups accept one another as equals. There will still be cultural differences, but all racial groups have been created in the divine image.

### **Early Forms of Slavery**

All we can say is that there are differences. It cannot be maintained that all individuals are equal. Some are indeed more intelligent than others, but this cannot be attributed to racial or biological differences. Aristotle, for example, believed that superior people should rule, and others should become their slaves. Plato believed that philosophers, due to their superior wisdom, should be the rulers. In neither case, however, did these Greek Philosophers attribute intelligence to one race nor did they make slaves of other racial groups. When they talk about slaves, who have inferior wisdom, they are talking about making slaves of people within their own racial group.

### **The Sources of Prejudice**

Racial prejudice can be defined as any judgment of a person based upon “race” rather than “knowledge” of individual qualities. Where does such prejudice come from? There are at least three sources of prejudice.

#### *Economic Necessity*

One way that prejudice emerges is through economic necessity. African blacks were made slaves out of what was perceived as economic necessity. It was very important to the economy of the South, and so people had to rationalize what they were doing when they made slaves out of another racial group.

#### *Frustration and Failure*

Prejudice also emerges out of a sense of frustration and failure. One blames personal failure on others. In times of failure one feels better when such failure can be blamed on another racial group.

#### *Prejudice is Taught*

Contrary to popular opinion, prejudice is not due to ignorance of the other race, although ignorance can play a role in continuing it. Prejudice is carefully taught through one’s own culture, which is to say that one is taught to hate another race by one’s parents and peers. Such teaching takes place in public and private schools and even in churches.

## **Types of Discrimination**

Discrimination is the result of racial prejudice, and takes one of several forms. One could say that while prejudice is a judgment, discrimination is the turning of that judgment into action against the other racial group. Such action usually takes expression in one of the following ways.

### *Humiliation*

This form of discrimination attempts to humiliate the other racial group. It is an attempt, conscious or unconscious, to keep the inferior race in its place, even though there may not be any strict separation of the races. The inferior race does menial work. There may be a great deal of racial mixing, but they can never be considered as equals. They must not intermarry with the superior race, although they might be able to live in the same neighborhood and even attend the same schools. There are relationships with the other racial group, but all such relationships take on the characteristics of superiority towards the other group.

### *Separation*

Sometimes a racial group does not claim to be better; they just want to live apart from other races. The desire to live separately can be related to a hatred of the other race. In the United States the separation of the races was called “segregation.” In South Africa it was called “apartheid.” When two races are separated there is very little mixing of the races. People live in different parts of the city or country. They attend different schools, and marriage between the races is considered to be taboo.

### *Extermination*

The most severe form of discrimination is the desire to exterminate the hated race. Adolf Hitler tried to exterminate all of the Jews, and did succeed in putting more than 6,000,000 of them to death. He saw them as a threat to his own race, and he reacted by trying to build a superior race. The Jews were viewed as being inferior, and thus there was an attempt to exterminate them.

## **The Jewish Scriptures**

The Jewish Scriptures clearly state that God created all persons in his own image.

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:27, NRSV)

This is the list of the descendants of Adam. When God created humankind, he made them in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them “Humankind” when they were created. (Genesis 5:1-2, NRSV)

If this is true way back in the Book of Genesis, how did discrimination ever begin?

### *Discrimination*

Those who try to support discrimination from the Jewish Scriptures usually draw upon the story of Noah and his three sons.<sup>1</sup> It seems that Noah got drunk, and the youngest son, Ham, saw his nakedness and told his two brothers about it. The two brothers, Shem and Japheth covered their father’s body, and did not look at his nakedness. When Noah woke up from his drunken stupor, he said: “Cursed be Canaan; lowest of slaves shall he be to his brothers.”<sup>2</sup>

According to the tradition, Ham became the father of the Negroid race, Shem became the father of the Jewish or Semitic race, and Japheth became the father of the Asian and European races.

### *Intermarriage*

Another passage from the Jewish Scriptures that is frequently used to support the separation of the races is the prohibition against intermarriage. Deuteronomy 7:3-4 (NRSV) summarizes the position:<sup>3</sup>

Do not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for that would turn away your children from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the LORD would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly.

What is frequently overlooked is that these references do not support the separation of the races because of racial differences, but because of religious differences. The Jews were afraid that intermarriage

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<sup>1</sup> See Genesis 9:20-27.

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 9:25 (NRSV).

<sup>3</sup> See Ezra 10:10-11 as well.

would cause the Jewish spouse, and children, to give up their worship of the One true God, and turn to idolatry. “Racial intermarriage as such,” concludes Gardner, “does not seem to be either prohibited or advocated in the Bible.”<sup>1</sup>

### *Opposition to Racism*

One can find Bible passages to support the separation of the races, but the most powerful opposition to racism and discrimination comes out of the books of Ruth and Jonah. In these two books we find an attempt to get the Jews to accept other races, but not their idolatry. Jonah talks about God’s love for and mercy to other races, and Ruth talks about a Jewish boy’s marriage to a Moabite girl.<sup>2</sup> In marrying Boaz, Ruth accepts and practices his faith.

### **The Christian Scriptures**

#### *Jesus*

The most important passage supporting the inclusion of all races comes from the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20 (NRSV):

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

#### *Peter*

In the Christian Scriptures the Church began among the Jews, but it quickly spread to the Gentiles (non-Jewish races). At first the Jews wanted to make people of other races into Jews, but the Council in Jerusalem decided against that.<sup>3</sup> Peter had some difficulty accepting other races, but he finally realized that God accepts and loves all races. This discovery took place long before the Council in Jerusalem. In Acts 10:34-35 (NRSV), Peter said: “I truly understand that God shows no

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<sup>1</sup> Gardner, *Biblical Ethics and Social Ethics*, p. 349.

<sup>2</sup> Opposition to the Moabites can be found in Deuteronomy 23:3 and Numbers 13:1. The Book of Ruth informs us that Ruth, a Moabite girl, married Boaz a Jew. According to 1 Kings 11:1, King Solomon also loved Moabite women. David and Solomon were descendants of Ruth, as was Jesus.

<sup>3</sup> See Acts 15:1-21 for a full account of the Council in Jerusalem.

partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.”

### *Paul*

Paul attempted to carry out the Great Commission and found easier going among the Gentiles, and so he wrote that famous passage in Galatians 3:27-28 (NRSV) that includes everyone under God’s grace and love.

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 3:5-6 (NRSV) refers to this new inclusion as the Mystery of Christ.

In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

The only time Paul taught against intermarriage was when he warned Christians not to intermarry with pagans. This is consistent with the teachings of the Jewish Scriptures. Intermarriage has never been forbidden on racial grounds, but it has been forbidden on religious grounds.

### *The Church Today*

The Church still has racial problems. In Germany the problem was between the Germans and the Jews and many congregations split over the issue. In the Middle East there is a problem between the Jews and the Arabs. In the United States, and many other parts of the world, there have been problems between Blacks and Whites. Many of these problems have penetrated the churches, but the Church still believes that God loves all persons, regardless of race; therefore, all races should accept and love one another. This is God’s Intentional Will.

Unfortunately what ought to be is not what is happening. In America, where discrimination is against the law, the Church is still “the most segregated major institution in American society.”<sup>1</sup> Yet, the Church is opposed to discrimination in all its forms. The Supreme

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<sup>1</sup> Gardner, *Biblical Ethics and Social Ethics*, p. 344.

Court of the United States ruled against segregation in the public schools on May 17, 1954, thus reversing the “separate but equal public schools” that had been permitted by the Court since 1896. All the Christian churches supported this ruling, and the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches declared the following:

The second Assembly of the World Council of Churches declares its conviction that any form of segregation based on race, color, or ethnic origin is contrary to the Gospel, and is incompatible with the Christian doctrine of man and with the nature of the Church of Christ. The Assembly urges the churches within its membership to renounce all forms of segregation or discrimination and to work for their abolition within their own life and within society.<sup>1</sup>

### **Methods of Fighting Discrimination**

The first thing that we must recognize is that it is God’s Intentional Will that we oppose all forms of discrimination. God created us all in his image for fellowship and communion with himself. The human race is thus one in origin and one in its essential nature. There are differences, but these differences are not important. We are not all created equal, but we are all loved equally by God. God intended for us all to be brothers and sisters, and when we deny God’s Intentional Will, we bring God’s judgment down upon ourselves. The racial strife that we experience is actually the judgment of God on us for our refusal to live together as brothers and sisters. But God’s aim is not to judge and condemn, but to redeem. He judges in order to redeem. In order to be redeemed, we must accept God’s judgment and forgiveness in humility, and then we must begin to manifest the love we have received to others.

How can we overcome racism? There are at least seven areas in which racism needs to be overcome. They are as follows:

1. Sports
2. Work/Labor and the Professions
3. Politics
4. Education
5. Housing
6. Marriage
7. The Church

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<sup>1</sup> World Council of Churches, Evanston, 1954.

One strategy might be to try to overcome racism in sports first, and then working on down the list, finally overcoming it in the Church. We need to overcome racism in all of these areas, without neglecting any of them. Instead of being a follower, the church needs to lead in the negation of racism. One strategy that we might use is to stand firm on affirming the equality of all racial groups. This would also have to include the welcoming of persons of all races within our worship, within our leadership, and within our small Discipleship Groups, which focus on the Great Commission of Jesus to make disciples of all nations (and races).

If there is any teaching in the Christian Scriptures that gives guidance, it is the command of Jesus to love our neighbors, even our enemies, as he has loved us.<sup>1</sup> John Wesley rejected slavery in no uncertain terms in a letter of support which he wrote to Wilbur Wilberforce, dated February 24, 1791:

Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils; but, *if God be for you, who can be against you?* Are all of them together stronger than God? O! *“be not weary in well doing.”* Go on, in the name of God, and in the power of His might, till even American slavery, the vilest that ever saw the sun, shall vanish away before it.<sup>2</sup>

Wesley included his opposition to slavery in the fourth statement of the latest edition of the General Rules, under “Do no harm!” This General Rule states unequivocal opposition to “Slaveholding; buying or selling slaves.” Every Methodist preacher had to (and still does have to) accept the General Rules, which includes this clear rejection of the buying or the selling of slaves.

When Methodism became a Church at the Christmas Conference in 1784 in the city of Baltimore, the members of that first Conference decried slavery as “contrary to the Golden Law of God.” The following was presented and accepted by the Conference:

We...therefore think it our most bounden Duty, to take immediately some effectual Method to extirpate this Abomination

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<sup>1</sup> See John 13:34 and Matthew 5:43-48.

<sup>2</sup> L. Tyerman, (1871). *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley* (Vol. 3, pp. 650–651). London: Hodder and Stoughton.



from among us. And for that purpose we add the following to the Rules of our Society.<sup>1</sup>

One of these rules directed that any Methodist who bought, sold, or gave away slaves was to be expelled immediately from the Methodist Episcopal Church, unless such acts were done in order to free people from their enslavement. Other rules declared that Methodists were to begin emancipating their slaves immediately and they had five years in which to finish the job. The alternatives were voluntary withdrawal or expulsion from the new Church. Before six months passed, compromises were made for the sake of growth and unity, and Methodism gave way to the emerging American culture. In 1790 the United States passed the Naturalization Law, making race an explicit legal category by limiting the right of naturalization to free white persons.<sup>2</sup> In situations like this, the Church must stand against Culture.

Martin Luther King, Jr. proved that different racial groups could work together for freedom and equality, but not without cost. Close to the beginning his struggle on behalf of American Blacks. King is reported to have said as early as February 24, 1956:

If we are arrested every day, if we are exploited every day, if we are trampled over every day, don't ever let anyone pull you so low as to hate them. We must use the weapon of love. We must have compassion and understanding for those who hate us. We must realize so many people are taught to hate us that they are not totally responsible for their hate. But we stand in life at midnight; we are always on the threshold of a new dawn.<sup>3</sup>

As far as we know, Martin Luther King, Jr. never changed his mind. When he died, he was still teaching the way of Jesus—love, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Race relations will only be improved when Christians use the standard of Jesus, to love their neighbors and place their needs equal to, or even above, their own. In conclusion, all races have a right to freedom, a recognition of equality, and an obligation of

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Yrigoyen, Jr. John Wesley: *Holiness of Heart and Life* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), p. 86.

<sup>2</sup> Scott Kisker, *Mainline or Methodist* (Discipleship Resources, 2008), pp. 45-46.

<sup>3</sup> This is a quote taken from Georgia Harkness.

responsibility. This is God's Intentional Will. We cannot allow economic, political, or religious circumstances to cause us to deviate from God's Intentional will.

### Conclusions

While one can find passages in Scripture to support slavery, the major passages support the equality of all races. We have all been created in the image of God, and we are all called to become disciples of Jesus Christ.

The Methodist Episcopal Church should have maintained its opposition to slavery, even though it would have meant the loss of unity and the shrinking of its membership. After all, the new Methodist Episcopal Church had declared its mission "to reform the continent and to spread scriptural holiness through these lands,"<sup>1</sup> They had come close to the Moral Light, but they tolerated the darkness. Tolerance of other races is not the same as regarding all races equal. The Intentional Will of God is equality, not tolerance. Tolerance can hardly be accepted as the Circumstantial Will of God.

When the law of the Land is incompatible with Scripture and the Moral Light, Christians have no other choice than to disobey the law of the Land. They must come out against such a culture or transform it, such as was accomplished by Martin Luther King, Jr. It's the working out of justice.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Yrigoyen, Jr. *John Wesley: Holiness of Heart and Life* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), p. 77.

## 8. CLASS OR STATUS

**Servanthood: The Intentional Will of God**  
**Privilege: The Circumstantial Will of God**

*Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,  
who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God  
as something to be exploited,  
but emptied himself taking the form of a slave...*

**Philippians 2:5-7a (NRSV)**

It is important that we take seriously the problem of class or status. The New Testament contains a number of references and has something to say about such distinctions. One of the most interesting passages is Mary's *Song of Praise* in which she shares with her cousin Elizabeth the good news of Jesus' coming birth.

His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.<sup>1</sup>

If the New Testament seems to be opposed to the wealthy and dominating classes, then the first question we must ask is how such classes emerge?

### **The Sources of Class**

Max Weber suggests that class is the result of income, power, and prestige.<sup>2</sup> The sources of class can be set forth even more clearly by saying that class emerges as a result of one's education, money, and power. All of these sources are not of equal value, for our status could remain high even though our income is low. However, it cannot be denied that the combination of education, money, and power certainly

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 1:50-53 (NRSV).

<sup>2</sup> J. Milton Yinger, *The Scientific Study of Religion* (London: the Macmillan Company, 1970), pp. 285-286.

contribute a great deal to our social class, even though the lack of one of these elements may or may not seriously affect our status in society.

### **The Meaning of Class**

Two basic interpretations have been given to class. The most common one is that wealth is a sign of God's favor. People possess wealth and power because God has given it to them as a trust. Thus, those who possess money and power do so with God's blessing, and those who lack these things must submit themselves to them. To rebel would be a sign of rebellion against God himself.

The second interpretation teaches that God is really only on the side of the poor and the powerless. Poverty is the Will of God. Francis of Assisi interpreted the situation in this way and sought poverty. Indeed it is of much comfort to the poor to believe that God identifies only with the poor, and that Jesus himself was poor. The poor generally see themselves as not only lacking in money, but also in power. Therefore the lower classes see God identifying with both the poor and the oppressed, and they find much comfort in the teaching that God is against the rich and the oppressors.

Where does the truth lie? Do we have class distinctions because God favors certain people and grants money and power to them, or do we have class distinctions because certain people use their power and money against others? If the first suggestion is true, there is little that the lower classes can do; but if the second is the case, then the lower classes are likely to rise up in revolt against the upper classes.

The whole question can be reduced to this: Why are the poor *poor*? Is God punishing them, or are they being oppressed by the rich? St. Basil believed the first option to be true. That is why he wrote:

Why are you rich and that man poor? You make your own things given you to distribute. The coat which you preserve in your wardrobe belongs to the naked; the bread you keep belongs to the hungry. The gold you have hidden in the ground belongs to the needy.<sup>1</sup>

If the poor feel that God is on their side, they will be highly motivated to revolt against the rich.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944, p. 92.

## **Religion and Class**

Is religion the opium of the people, or can it be a stimulant for the people? Does religion make the lower classes accept their lower position in society, or does religion cause the lower classes to revolt against the upper classes? The answer is that religion has frequently done both. The lower classes are more likely to revolt when they believe their poverty is a result of the oppression of the upper classes, or they perceive the possibility of actually changing things. If they believe that their poverty is due to their non-election by God, then they are less likely to revolt. They are also less likely to revolt against the upper classes if they feel that their situation is the result of their own sin, and that God is therefore punishing them.

## **The Reversal of Values**

There are many passages that speak of the lower classes. In Luke 6:20 (NRSV) Jesus said to the poor: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." In John 12:8 (NRSV), he said: "You always have the poor with you..." There is no question that Jesus seems to identify with the poor and the oppressed, and has many words of condemnation for the rich and the oppressors. For example, he said in Matthew 19:24 (NRSV): "Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." In Matthew 19:30 (NRSV) he concludes: "But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."

This does not mean that Jesus approves of class distinctions and desires to accept the poor and reject the rich. It simply means that Jesus reverses all values about class and status. He is not saying that the poor are righteous and the rich are sinners. There are many poor and oppressed people who also reject God and their neighbors; and if they had a chance, they would themselves become the rich oppressors. There are also rich people who accept God and really want to find a solution to the problems of class distinctions and poverty. Many of these people just do not know the answers to the problems. Jesus is simply indicating that it is much more difficult for people in the upper classes to recognize and accept God than it is for the poor and the oppressed.

Perhaps it is not so much that Jesus favors one class over another as he simply reverses everyone's values. When the request is made for James and John to take their place on the right and the left side of Jesus in the coming Kingdom, Jesus teaches his disciples: "...whoever

wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.”<sup>1</sup>

This strange reversal of values is beautifully portrayed in Philippians 2:5-11 (NRSV):

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,  
    who, though he was in the form of God,  
    did not regard equality with God  
    as something to be exploited,  
but emptied himself  
    taking the form of a slave,  
    being born in human likeness.  
And being found in human form,  
    he humbled himself  
    and became obedient to the point of death—  
    even death on a cross.  
Therefore God also highly exalted him  
    and gave him the name  
    that is above every name,  
so that at the name of Jesus  
    every knee should bend,  
    in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
and every tongue should confess  
    that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
    to the glory of God the Father.

In this hymn we find that the aim of Jesus is not to take advantage of his privileged position, but to take upon himself the form of a servant. Christians are not simply to overthrow the upper classes, taking from them their power and money; rather, Christians are to follow the path of Jesus, which means to become servants. This is the Intentional Will of God. The rich and powerful are not let off easy. They are not to justify their privileged positions as the Will of God, but they too are asked to become servants. Class is not to be justified or sought, at least by Christians, for their only aim is to enter into a life of service. This may involve the use of money and power, but its use is for the establishment of justice and not self-elevation. This may also involve our willingness to give up those every characteristics which give us status or class in society. Servanthood is the Intentional Will of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 10:43b-44 (NRSV); See the larger context of this story in Mark 10:35-45 and again in Matthew 20:20-28.

## Conclusions

Scripture clearly calls us to servanthood, but servanthood is difficult to accept. As our education and earnings increase we expect to gain respect and grow wealthy. With seniority should come some status. Isn't servanthood similar to slavery? Aren't we among the elect?

According to Scripture the elect have a responsibility to be light. In Isaiah 42:6-7 and 49:6-7, God commands,

I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.

It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.

The difficulty is that we assume responsibility carries with it status; after all we are the bearers of God's light. There should be some reward for this. Jesus gives the same command to his disciples in Matthew 5:14-16:

You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

The thing that needs to be emphasized here is that all this light is to shine on our Father in Heaven and the salvation he brings to Jew and to Gentile alike. Emerson Colaw tells a story about the death of King Louis XIV that illustrates the purpose of the light. When the King died, his body was placed in the Cathedral, where mourners could pay their final respects. The room was darkened, except for a single candle, which illuminated a golden casket containing the mortal remains of the great King. At just the right time, the Court Preacher appeared to address the mourners. The Preacher rose, reached from his pulpit and snuffed out the single candle, which had been put there to symbolize

the greatness of the King. Then, from the darkness, he spoke just four words, “God only is great.”<sup>1</sup>

Mark told a powerful story about James and John, who wanted some recognition for the work they had been doing. They went to Jesus and demanded, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” They didn’t say who wanted his right side in contrast to his left side. Jesus replied, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” They replied, “We are able.” Then Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.” When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. So Jesus called them and said to them, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.”<sup>2</sup>

I’m not sure how that went over. If the disciples had difficulty with servanthood, so will we. Remember this, James and John’s request made the other disciples angry. They too were having difficulty with servanthood. We too must learn how to serve. We serve best as mirrors, who catch the light and reflect it into every dark corner of the world.

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<sup>1</sup> Emerson Colaw, *Beliefs of a United Methodist Christian* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> See Mark 10:35-44.



## 9. ECONOMICS

### Religious Socialism: The Intentional Will of God Compassionate Capitalism: The Circumstantial Will of God

*For even when we were with you,  
we gave you this command:  
“Anyone unwilling to work should not eat.”*

#### 2 Thessalonians 3:10 (NRSV)

Economic life has to do with production, distribution, and consumption of material goods and the way in which these goods fulfill our primary and secondary needs..

#### Our Primary Needs

Roger Mehl defines our primary needs as food, clothing, and housing.<sup>1</sup> This does not mean that the only aim of economic life is to supply our primary needs. Emil Brunner makes us aware of the fact that there is more to human life than food, clothing, and shelter.

The function of the economic life is not merely to meet man’s physical needs, much less imply to provide the barest necessities for physical existence; rather, it is “to place at [our] disposal a surplus of goods possible.” Its function is to enable [us] not just to live, but “to live in a human way.”<sup>2</sup>

#### Our Secondary Needs

Roger Mehl also defines our secondary needs. He says that we also stand in need of health, security, culture, and leisure. Our secondary needs will usually differ according to who is making up the list. Some may prefer to list only those things that are organized by society; while, others may desire to be more comprehensive in their list. It seems to me that the following items must be included in any list that claims to be comprehensive: education, medical care, national security, leisure or recreation, security in old age, and possibly, religion. There might be some real questions as to whether religion should be considered a secondary need or a primary need. After all, it was Jesus who

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in E. Clinton Gardner, *Biblical Faith and Social Ethics* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1960), p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 277.

answered Satan with the following words: “One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”<sup>1</sup> I have decided to place religion among the secondary needs because not everyone feels the need for religion; however, I still consider religion among the more important of all our needs. I list it as secondary only because I admit that a person can live without much reference to it.

### **Work: the Means to Fulfilling Our Needs**

The means to fulfilling primary and secondary needs is through work or labor. Every person should have the means by which to fulfill both primary and secondary needs without too much anxiety. Usually this means that one needs an income, although it may be possible in some societies to operate without the use of money. Most societies do use money, and so our discussion presupposes the use of money. “The purpose of work,” said W. D. Weatherford, “is not primarily to make money. It is meant to produce values of many kinds, and of course the one who creates them should help enjoy them.”<sup>2</sup>

### **The Origin of Work**

There are two accounts in the Book of Genesis that give us some understanding about the origin of work.

#### *Work is Natural*

The first of these states that work is natural, and it is recorded in Genesis 2:15-17 (NRSV)

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.”

In this account Adam is told to till the garden, and that he is free to use the fruit for his own consumption. He was expected to work even before the Fall. This is God’s Intentional Will.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 4:4 (NRSV).

<sup>2</sup> W. D. Weatherford, *Studies in Christian Experience* (Nashville: Methodist Evangelistic Materials, 1962), p. 85.

### *Work is Punishment*

In the second account, Adam disobeys God, and his punishment is work. This is God's Circumstantial Will. Thus, we read in Genesis 3:17-18 (NRSV).

Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, "You shall not eat of it," cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field.

This account seems to say that sin precedes labor, at least hard labor, while the first account presupposes labor before sin. Whether sin precedes labor or follows it, one thing is very clear to us all. We must work in order to fulfill our needs.

### *Work is Necessary*

Work is generally thought of as an intent of creation, which is to say that we would have to work even if sin were absent in our lives. Sin certainly affects our labor, and it may even make it more painful; but sin did not bring about the necessity of work. We would have to work even if we lived prior to the Fall. Paul had words for anyone who was unwilling to work. "Anyone unwilling to work," he said in 2 Thessalonians 3:10b, "should not eat." Since work is necessary, it is only natural for us to seek some kind of meaning in work.

### **The Purpose of Work**

It has already been stated that we work in order to fulfill our primary and secondary needs, but most of us work for a wage, a salary, or some kind of profit in order to be able to buy the things we need. The need for money is so great that we are often willing to do monotonous and even dangerous work to obtain it. Without this monetary incentive, it is highly doubtful that some of us would have the same incentive and enthusiasm for work. At the same time we must admit that earning money is not the only important thing involved in working. Many people take up jobs that pay much less, and their reasons are that they want to find some kind of personal fulfillment in their work. But even personal fulfillment is not enough for some people, for they want to believe that they are making some kind of real contribution to society. It is very difficult to list these three purposes for work in any order of importance, for they are all important. Let us just say that the purpose of work is threefold: (1) to obtain our primary and secondary needs, (2) to find personal fulfillment, and (3) to serve society.

If one of the purposes of work is to obtain money to fulfill our primary and secondary needs, we need to ask the additional question of how this is done. There are at least four ways in which money is obtained. The first of these is through receiving wages and salaries for services rendered to others. Another method of obtaining money is through buying and selling things. Profit is the reward given to those who are willing to invest time and money in the buying and selling of goods. One should not, however, make too much of a distinction between wages and profits, for wages are usually paid out of profits. A third method of obtaining money is through renting one's land, building or buildings, and any other properties to others. Finally, one can obtain money through lending money to others. These are the four main areas or means by which we obtain money, and they are frequently interrelated to one another. There are other means, such as gambling and stealing, but our purpose is to list the legitimate means of obtaining money. It must be said, however, that for many years the church did not consider "interest" as a legitimate means of obtaining money. This was especially true in regard to the poor, as indicated in Leviticus 22:25, which says: "If you lend money to my people, to the poor among you, you shall not deal with them as a creditor, you shall not exact interest from them."

### **The Meaning of Work**

Today work has been divided into two parts, one being religious (vocation) and the other being secular (occupation). This split can be traced all the way back to Plato and Aristotle who saw the working class as inferior; therefore, they forced them to do manual labor so that the intellectuals might have sufficient leisure for philosophy. This attitude towards work also reflects the Greek dualism of the body and soul. It means working with the hands is inferior to working with the mind, and thus we have the split between manual labor and white collar jobs.

Monasticism added to this split by making a sharp distinction between a religious and secular order. They began to stress religious work as being of higher value than that of the secular. Only monks and priests were considered to be commissioned by God in their work, and thus secular work did not have the same religious significance attached to it. Luther broke with monasticism when he closed down the monasteries and emphasized the sacredness of common work and life. It is generally accepted that the Old and New Testaments do not call manual labor inferior. Many of the Old Testament heroes worked with their hands. The same is true in the New Testament. We find many examples

of shepherds, fishermen, carpenters, and tentmakers. The greatest figures in the Bible are not monks or philosophers, but men and women who worked with their hands. Jesus was a carpenter. Peter was a fisherman, and Paul was a tentmaker.

### **Property: the Question of Ownership**

Christianity is very radical in regard to property, for it claims that God owns everything and that we own nothing. This is the message of the Psalmist, who said: “The earth is the LORD’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; for he has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers.”<sup>1</sup> This is also the message of Jesus’ parable concerning stewardship in Luke 19:11-27. God owns everything, and we are his stewards. This means that we can possess and use things, but that we own nothing. It also means that God holds us responsible for the way in which we use things, and that we will have to give an account to God for our stewardship in the future.

### **Personal Possessions**

The commandment, “You shall not steal”<sup>2</sup> assumes that we can possess things, but we do not own anything absolutely. We are given power over certain things, and told to take control of them and use them for our benefit.<sup>3</sup> Yet there is a limit to what anyone should be able to control or possess. No individual should have so much that he or she becomes indifferent to his or her dependence upon God. This is the message of the parable of the rich fool in Luke 12:13-21. The rich fool did not realize that all those possessions really belonged to God, and that he was only a steward of them. It is not necessarily sinful to possess things, but it is sinful to worship things. As one uses possessions one should be aware of the fact that: “...to whom much has been given,

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 24:1-2 (NRSV).

<sup>2</sup> Exodus 20:15 (NRSV).

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 1:26-29 (NRSV) “Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’ So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.’”

much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.”<sup>1</sup>

### **The Means of Production**

The discussion has not always centered around private ownership of things, even though Communism has seen private property as the basis of selfishness and exploitation. The discussion is usually concerned about the ownership of the means of production. Should the means of production be controlled by private business, or should they be controlled by government? Capitalism, on the one side, has stressed the importance of private ownership; while Socialism has stressed the necessity of government ownership. Usually Socialism indicates that government controls the means of production on behalf of the people. Most countries have a mixture of the two. Some businesses are owned privately, while others are under government control. It is important to note that both systems are subject to corruption. Bertrand J. Coggle and John P.K. Byrnes point this out in their book, *Christian Social Ethics*:

The truth is that unredeemed man will pervert any system. Education merely provides him with more ability to pursue his selfishness or to camouflage it more effectively. The failure of Society, Communism or of the British Welfare State, to make a perfect society should not be a surprise to a Christian. The conception of man as a sinful being needing divine help and forgiveness should safeguard us from dangerous illusions. We must add that the doctrine of sin also reflects human dignity, since it is based on moral responsibility.

### **The Role of Unions**

In many capitalist countries the trade unions have helped to counteract some of the evils of private ownership of the means of production. Trade unions have helped to balance the power between management and labor, but in some ways, they have also aggravated the tension between wages and employment. As the minimum wage has been forced upward, full employment tended to decrease. Moreover, the trade unions push for wage increases which in turn cause prices to go up, and this has in turn hurt the consumer. Perhaps what is now needed is an organization with sufficient power to protect the consumer from both private ownership and the trade unions. Indeed, such organizations are already in existence, and many more are in the process of formation. After all, economics involves much more than the produc-

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 12:48b (NRSV).

tion and distribution of goods; therefore, it is only right that there be some form of organization for those who consume those goods.

### **Conclusions**

To some extent, neither Religious Socialism nor Compassionate Capitalism represent God's Intentional Will. Both can only be considered to be under God's Circumstantial Will; nevertheless, Religious Socialism comes closer to God's Intentional Will. Just what is God's Intentional Will in economics? God's Intentional Will would be done when everyone has their primary and secondary needs met, and when no one goes hungry or homeless.

According to Matthew 25:34-40, Jesus expects us to fulfill one another's primary and secondary needs:

Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me. Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

If the government fails to take our primary and secondary needs seriously, it becomes the responsibility of the church. These needs won't be fulfilled until everyone has an opportunity for an education, and everyone is willing to work for a living. God intends for us to work, and if we won't work, we don't have a right to complain. There should be some kind of work for everyone, even the disabled. Work gives us integrity. This is precisely what everyone needs, especially the poor. Clarence Jordan put it as follows: "What the poor need is not charity but capital, not caseworkers but coworkers, And what the rich need is a wise, honorable, and just way of divesting themselves of their overabundance."

Those first disciples saw the light and organized themselves for the task. Acts 4:32 describes their response:

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

Some will interpret the above as a failure in Communism, but I'd call it an attempt to fulfill the Intentional Will of God. Christianity has to be able to live under any economic system, but it can always aim at developing an economic system more compatible with itself. The response to any given economic system depends upon how close or far away from Christianity that economic system is. The farther away a particular economic system stands, the more Christianity will have to stand against it, and the closer it comes to Christianity, the more it can expect to be supported,



## 10. POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

### **The Kingdom of God: The Intentional Will of God Democracy: The Circumstantial Will of God**

*For the Lord's sake accept the authority  
of every human institution,  
whether of the emperor as supreme,  
or of governors, as sent by him  
to punish those who do wrong  
and to praise those who do right.*

**1 Peter 2:13-14 (NRSV)**

#### **A Definition of Politics**

The word politics comes from the Greek word “Polis” which means “city.” It has to do with the organization of an independent city-state, which governed itself. Such political organization can be called a “State” or “Government,” and should be distinguished from what is commonly called the “Nation” or the “People.” The State (or the Government) rules the Nation or the People.

Why is it necessary to organize a State or Government? Why should some rule over others? The answer is simple. We all have primary needs such as food, shelter, and clothing; there are also our secondary needs. If we did not organize ourselves, then some people would have more than they need, while others would not have enough. Because there are many things that would be in short supply, there must be some group responsible for seeing to it that these things are shared. Without the power of the Government, some would have too much, while others would not have enough or none at all.

#### **The Purpose of the Government**

Government has both a positive and a negative task. Government would be necessary even if we never did anything wrong, but because we frequently do wrong, Government has the task of restraining our wrongdoing. The task of Government is to organize society so that we all get our fair share, and those who try to get more are justly restrained. The difficulty lies in trying to determine what that fair share is and how much we should be restrained from obtaining more than our fair share.

### *The Government Maintains Order*

The Government must maintain order within the Nation and between Nations. Sin forces the Government to punish evildoers within the Nation. Without sin, our differences might be reconciled without force, but because of sin, the Government must use force to settle our conflicts. The Government, however, has a much larger task than to settle arguments between individuals: it must also defend itself from attack, both from within the Nation and from other Nations. This means that it must have a police force and an army, navy, and air force. It must have modern weapons that can be used against any Nation that tries to attack it. Its role in defense is justified only in the sense that the people support those who are in power. The presence of sin makes it necessary for the Government to use force against any who threaten the welfare of the Government and the Nation as a whole.

### *The Government Establishes Justice*

The Government has the very difficult task of establishing justice. Justice means that we are allowed to make certain choices affecting our lives, and that we be given opportunities to improve ourselves. Thus we usually define justice in terms of liberty and equality. If there is to be justice, we must be free, but our freedom cannot injure our neighbors. If there is to be justice, there must be equal opportunities for all. Moreover, everyone—both the rich and the poor—should receive equal treatment before the law, and all should receive a fair share of the fruits of our society.

### **Rights and Opportunities**

This means that there are certain rights and opportunities, which should be given to all. Some of these basic rights and opportunities are described in the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” which was published by the United Nations in 1948.

#### *Rights*

At least four of these basic rights can be summarized as the right to own property, the right to speak freely, the right to assemble, and the right to exercise citizenship.

1. **The Right to Own Property.** We all have the right to own property. This right does not mean that we can own all the property we desire. We cannot obtain so much property that there is not enough left for others, nor should we own so much that we exercise absolute power over others. This simply means that all of us have the right to be stewards of some property. In the end, God owns everything.

2. The Right to Speak Freely. All of us should have the right to speak freely. We should be able to criticize our own Government without fear of being put in prison. We should have the right to say what we want so long as we do not take up violent action against the Government. When we do this, it is understandable why the Government has the right to silence us. The Government also has the right to preserve itself against acts of violence that threaten its preservation.

3. The Right to Assemble. In addition to free speech, we should have the right to assemble together and discuss things that interest us. We should not have to fear interference from the Government. This also means that we must assemble without intending to harm others. This freedom or right to assemble also includes the right to assemble for worship. We should be given the right to assemble for the worship of God according to our own consciences. No Government has the right to tell us how to worship God.

4. The Right to Exercise Citizenship. Finally we should have the right to exercise our citizenship. We should be given the right to vote for the candidate of our choice, and every person should have the right to become a candidate. When candidates have to pay large sums of money in order to become candidates, this generally discriminates against the poor, who are unable to raise such large sums of money.

### *Opportunities*

There are also certain opportunities provided by the Government, which should be open to all regardless of racial origin or religious conviction.

1. The Opportunity for an Education. We should be able to obtain an adequate education. The responsibility for paying the cost of such an education should be taken out of taxes. Up to a certain level of education there should be no cost for tuition and books. If we desire to study beyond that level, it is understandable that we should pay for the cost of our own education.

2. The Opportunity for a Job. We should also be given the opportunity of obtaining a job that pays an adequate wage. We need an adequate wage to provide our primary needs of food, clothing, and shelter. In so far as possible, we should have the right to choose what kind of work we would like to do. The Government is not responsible for employing everyone, but it is responsible for making sure that everyone can find employment and for the establishment of a minimum wage.

3. The Opportunity for Security. There should also be adequate opportunity for security. Security involves several things. First, security involves access to proper medical care when sick. We have a right to proper medical attention, and it is not just a privilege for the rich. Secondly, we have a right to enjoy some leisure and recreation. We should not have to work all the time, but should have adequate resources for play. This means that we have an adequate wage to provide for an annual leave from our work, and that we should be given certain holidays throughout the year. Finally the Government has the responsibility of organizing a system so that retired persons have an adequate income, and will not have to be dependent upon their children or the Government itself. This involves the establishment and maintenance of some kind of Social Security program.

### **Development of Church and Government Relations**

What is the Church's role in regard to these "rights" and "opportunities?" In the past the Church has either tried to exert its own beliefs, or it has supported or criticized what the Government has done. Churches that have been most closely related to the Government have also been able to exercise the most control; while Churches separated from the Government have been in a better position to be critical, but they also have lacked power. In the past we have seen many different kinds of relationships between the Church and the Government.

#### *Integration*

The situation in early Judaism was one of integration between Religion and Government. It never occurred to the Jews to separate Religion and Government. Even the great prophets merely reminded the Kings of their religious responsibilities to the poor. There was never any thought of separating Religion from Government.

#### *Government Domination*

At the time of the birth of the early Christian Church, the Roman Caesars ruled with much power. The Church was a small minority, and it had little power in the Government. The Government ruled and Christians obeyed when they could, and when they could not, they accepted the consequences of disobedience. This type of Government domination lasted up until the Edict of Toleration in 313 C.E.

#### *Alliance*

After Constantine became a Christian a new type of relationship developed between the Church and the Government. The Church and the Government began to work together. The Government began to

defend and support the Church, and the Church in turn gave its support to the Government. This kind of relationship did not last for long, for it naturally led into a new kind of domination.

### *Church Domination*

Gradually the Church began to dominate the Government, and this period can be dated to Gregory the Great and his reign as pope (540-604 C.E.). At this time even Kings had to bow to the desire of the popes, and popes were eventually given authority to crown Kings. This kind of relationship existed in varying degrees up until the time of the Lutheran Reformation (1500s) and even beyond.

### *Theocracy*

In this type of relationship both the Government and the Church were placed under God. This was best represented by Calvin's attempt to set up a Theocracy in Geneva. The Government was not supposed to dominate the Church, nor was the Church supposed to dominate the Government. Both had their responsibilities under God, but of course, the Church was the one to interpret what those responsibilities were.

### *Separation*

In the modern age of religious pluralism, separation has become a necessity. Yet, this separation does not mean that no relationship exists; it simply means that no single Church or Religion can control the Government, nor should any Government support only one Church or Religion. In this relationship the Church does not possess as much power to influence or bring about these "freedoms" and "opportunities" but it is free to criticize the Government when it neglects its responsibilities.

### **Modern Relationships between Church and Government**

The separation between the Church and the Government is not the situation in every Nation. There are at least three types of relationships present in the modern world.

#### *Separation of the Church and the Government*

This relationship exists in countries such as the United States and Mexico, and of course, in all the Communist countries. It can either be a friendly separation or it can be a hostile relationship. Separation enables the Church to be more critical of the Government, but at the same time, the Church has less power to influence the affairs of the Government. It enables the Church to be more critical because it is not dependent upon the Government for its finances. However, one should also mention, that the Government may exercise restraint over the

criticism of the Church, and thus make it extremely difficult for the Church to be critical and have any influence at all in the affairs of Government.

### *Cooperation between the Church and the Government*

This kind of a relationship exists in those countries where the Government pays the salaries of the priests or ministers and supports the Churches through taxes. The best examples can be found in Western Europe. In many cases no one Church is selected as the State Church. Several Churches hold equal or nearly equal status within the country. These churches have more power in the affairs of Government, but because of their financial dependence, they generally are not as critical of the Government.

### *Integration of the Church and the Government*

In this type of relationship one Church is chosen as the State Church, and that is the only Church, which receives support from taxes. The best example of this relationship is that which exists between the Anglican Church and the Government in England. Other churches may exist within the country, but they will have no support from the Government, even though they will have to support the State Church through paying taxes. The State Church exercises considerable control over the affairs of the Government, but is not generally as critical because of its financial dependence. This type of relationship frequently becomes one of either Government dominance or Church dominance, and it is frequently difficult to tell the difference. Today it is more likely that the Government will dominate over the Church than for the Church to dominate over the Government.

## **Responsibilities of the Christian in Politics**

### *Responsibility to God*

Our primary responsibility is to God. This seems almost too simple, but it is not as easy as it sounds. When Peter and the Apostles were told to stop spreading their teaching around, they all answered back: "We must obey God rather than any human authority."<sup>1</sup> The Church has always recognized that we must obey God in questions of faith, but what must we do when our faith conflicts with our responsibility to the Government? It is not easy to answer this question, for it involves the working out of our faith in social ethics.

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 5:29 (NRSV)

### *Responsibility to the Government*

There are two brief passages that command us to obey our rulers. It would be best for us to analyze them briefly. They are Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-17:

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience. For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, busy with this very thing. Pay to all what is due them — taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due. (Romans 13:1-7, NRSV)

For the Lord's sake accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme, or of governors, as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. For it is God's Will that by doing right you should silence the ignorance of the foolish. As servants of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil. Honor everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the emperor. (1 Peter 2:13-17, NRSV)

There are two things that we are really commanded to do in these passages, and they are as follows:

1. Pay Taxes! Romans 13:6-7 tells us to pay legitimate taxes. This is also a commandment from Jesus in Mark 12:17 (NRSV), where he says: "Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." Both Jesus and Paul were aware of the corruption in Government, but both advised Christians to pay taxes, even to a corrupt Government. This does not mean that Christians should overlook corruption, but only that they are responsible for supporting the operation of Government.

2. Pray for Rulers! In 1 Timothy 2:1-2 (NRSV), we read: “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity.” This does not mean that our responsibility ends with paying taxes and praying for rulers, but it does mean that Christians are to do this much. The early Church was not completely naïve, for it knew how wicked some of their rulers could be. That is why Rome is called Babylon in Revelation 17:5-6.

We might ask why the early Christians did not challenge the evil that was present in their world. They did insist that they did not have to obey their Government in regard to faith, but in all other things they were to be obedient. There are two good reasons for their not challenging evil in their time. First, they were a very small minority. They lacked sufficient numbers and power to do very much about the political situation. Secondly, they believed that God would intervene in history; therefore, it was not really necessary for them to do anything. It was just a matter of time before all this evil would be brought down; therefore, it was not necessary for them to act against it. Thus, Christians obeyed the Government as long as it did not force them to disobey the laws of God, but they did not take any *direct* action against the evils of the Government. It can be argued, however, that the *indirect* action they took struck at the very root of the evil that was present in their time.

### Conclusions

As Christians we have dual citizenship; therefore, we must give allegiance to both God and the Government, but our ultimate allegiance will always go to God. Augustine calls this the conflict between the earthly city and the city of God. Luther picked up this same theme and suggested that Christians must obey the Gospel in personal relationships and the Government in social relationships. However, most modern theologians deny this, and insist that we cannot separate personal and social relationships. We must act responsibly, fully aware of the fact that we frequently sin, but that God forgives our sins. Others insist that acting responsibly is doing the right thing, even if it does seem to conflict with the teachings of Jesus. This problem will be considered more as we move into a discussion of war and revolution.



## 11. WAR AND REVOLUTION

### **Peace with Justice: The Intentional Will of God The Just War: The Circumstantial Will of God**

*Those conflicts and disputes among you,  
where do they come from?  
Do they not come from your cravings  
that are at war within you?  
You want something and do not have it;  
so you commit murder.  
And you covet something and cannot obtain it;  
so you engage in disputes and conflicts.  
You do not have, because you do not ask.*

**James 4:1-2 (NRSV)**

#### **The Problem of Violence**

The problems of war and revolution are difficult to deal with, and this is partly so because of the problem of violence. Most of us do not like violence, but we have never really stopped to consider what it really is. We usually associate violence with murder and killing, and do not realize that it means much more than that. To begin with, we must divide violence into two basic parts: personal and institutional.

#### *Personal Violence*

Personal violence includes both physical and psychological violence. In physical violence we destroy or injure people through physical attacks on them. Examples of this type of violence are common, and include such things as rape, murder, and even robbery. While robbery can be included in physical violence, it also borders on violence committed against things. Violence or the destruction of things is usually considered less harmful than violence committed against persons, but not everyone is willing to separate one's possessions from one's person. Many consider possessions as extensions of their personality. While this may be true to an extent, we must also admit that some possessions are less important than others. A second type of personal violence against others is psychological. In this case one does not physically attack another person, but simply uses threats and slander. This type of violence can be just as damaging, although it may not seem to be as destructive.

### *Institutional Violence*

The second type of violence is called institutional. It can also be divided up into physical and psychological violence. Physical violence refers to waging war against another nation or nations, and psychological violence refers to denying persons their rights within a society. This type of violence can be carried out by a minority in power, or even by the majority against a powerless minority. What distinguishes it from personal violence is the fact that it is institutionalized, which is to say that it is considered legal within a specific society.

### **Types of War**

Roland Bainton suggested three types of attitudes toward war.<sup>1</sup> These attitudes all reflect different attitudes towards violence. These attitudes concerning violence all have to do with whether “the end justifies the means.”

#### *The Crusade*

The first of these attitudes is that of the Crusade. This position clearly states that the end does indeed justify the means—any means. One sees one’s own cause as being justified by God, or some secular ideology. This cause justifies whatever means might be used, for the enemy is seen as being totally evil. Therefore the enemy must be destroyed.

#### *The Just War*

Augustine was the first Christian theologian to develop the Just War Criteria. He said that men sought peace by waging war. The end was peace, and so we find in this position that the end justifies only some means. A Just War is one in which the ruler defends the nation from aggression or compels the enemy to make reparation for wrongs committed against a nation. A Just War can never be fought for conquest, glory, or wealth; rather, a Just War must only be fought for the sake of peace and the restoration of relationships.

#### *Pacifism*

Pacifism was the position of the Early Church, right up to the time of Augustine, when it was said that no end could justify any means. War was considered to be against the Intentional Will of God, and thus Christians were not to participate in it. Today Pacifism is advocated for

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<sup>1</sup> Roland Bainton, *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960).

religious, philosophical, or even practical reasons. It can take the form of active resistance or it can be a complete withdrawal from the conflict. All pacifists are united in refusing to use violence against the enemy. Christians usually draw on the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) and Jesus' command to love the enemy (Matthew 5:43-48).

### **The Just War**

Judaism has never rejected War. Islam has accepted the possibility of the Crusade (Jihad).<sup>1</sup> Christianity has been more uncertain, and has usually supported either Pacifism or the Just War. Since the Just War finds more support than the other positions, it is this concept that needs the most explanation.

#### *Definition of the Just War*

Jacques Ellul in his book, *Violence*, suggests that there are seven conditions that must be present if a war is to be considered Just. They are as follows:

1. The cause fought for must itself be just.
2. The purpose of the warring power must remain just while hostilities go on.
3. War must be truly the last resort.
4. The methods employed during the war to vanquish the foe must themselves be just.
5. The benefits the war can reasonably be expected to bring for humanity must be greater than the evils provoked by the war itself.
6. Victory must be assured.
7. The peace concluded at the end of the war must be just and of such a nature as to prevent a new war.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Jihad* refers to the "struggle" with evil tendencies within oneself and within society. It can also refer to the struggle an Islamic State is having with an evil force that would threaten the destruction of Allah's community and world.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Violence* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1969), p. 6.

## **The Just War Criteria**

Let us now examine the more important of the criteria mentioned above and try to systematize them.

### *The Just Cause*

The cause has to do with preventing a wrong or making something right. The cause is usually related to self-defense, but could also be related to aggression if the intention is to make right a wrong. Usually the Just Cause must be related either to self-defense or human rights. Since human rights can easily become an issue leading to “The Crusade” most nations see self-defense or self-interest as the most important reasons for going to war.

### *The Just Intention*

Once it has decided that war must be fought, there is still the question of one’s real intention. Why is this war being waged? One should not aim at destroying the enemy, nor should one fight for the purpose of aggression and retaliation. The aim of the war should be to restore peace. A Just Intention aims at restoring relations between the two communities, and does not aim at destroying the other community. If a nation feels that it must fight a war of aggression, it does not hold on to the other nation’s land after the war is over. The aim is making right a wrong, and this cannot involve another wrong. The nation fighting a Just War does not intend to destroy the other nation, nor does it take land away from it.

### *The Competent Authority*

This third criterion involves the right to call a nation into war. Who has that right? It is not enough to say that the legal ruler or authorities have that right. One must also take into consideration whether or not such rulers or authorities have social support. Do the people in the nation really support their rulers? The rulers must have both legal and social authority, or they cannot be considered as competent authorities.

### *Just Conduct of the War*

The conduct of the war must also be just. Naturally this criterion already assumes that there is a reasonable hope of success in winning the war, and that the war is being fought as a last resort. No other alternative remains, but yet there are certain principles which must be followed in the conduct of that war.

### *The Principle of Proportion*

The first principle of conducting a war is that of proportion. Will the good outweigh the bad effects of the war? If waging the war causes more harm than enduring the evil, which caused the war, then the war cannot be justified. It is also important to calculate the advantages and disadvantages of each battle. It may be better to leave a city in tact, than to destroy it by winning the battle. One must ask how important this particular battle really is to the total war effort.

### *The Principle of Discrimination*

The second important principle of conducting the war has to do with discriminating between soldiers and civilians or between non-military and military targets. Only soldiers are to be killed, and only military targets are to be bombed. It is realized that one cannot always make such fine distinctions in the heat of war, but this is to be the intention of the Just War. Civilians will be destroyed and hospitals and schools will be destroyed, but this must never be the aim of those who mistakenly destroy them. If they are destroyed intentionally, then such conduct does not fall into the category of the Just War.

### **Problems with Just War Criteria**

Two recent events have made the Just War Theory difficult to maintain, and they are the invention of nuclear weapons and the emergence of insurgency warfare.

#### *Nuclear Weapons*

Nuclear weapons destroy more than military targets. That is their very intent. They were not created to distinguish between soldiers and civilians, but to destroy everything in sight. When used on cities, they cannot make distinctions between what is used for military purposes and what is clearly non-military, they destroy the whole city.

#### *Insurgency Warfare*

Insurgency warfare considers everyone as part of the war effort, and this means that there is no difference between soldiers and civilians. Everyone is considered a soldier, even though many do not wear uniforms. This problem will be taken up again as we deal with the problem of Revolution.

### **The Just Revolution**

Since there have been many efforts to justify revolution in our time, it may be helpful to analyze what some have called “The Just

Revolution.” The Revolution differs from war in that while war is fought between two nations, the Revolution occurs within one nation. It is usually defined as an attempt to overthrow the present Government and replace it with a more just Government. Those who apply Just War Criteria to Revolution encounter some serious problems, and so it might be best to bring out some of those problems.

### *The Just Cause*

The Revolution places the heaviest emphasis on the cause, and the cause is usually based on the lack of certain human rights. The righteousness of the cause is very clear to revolutionaries; and this causes them to justify nearly any means. This means that those involved in revolution have a difficult time keeping the Revolution outside of the Crusade alternative.

### *The Just Intention*

Most revolutionaries aim at destroying the enemy. Reconciliation is impossible. It is usually acknowledged that the only way a revolution can be successful is to picture the enemy as being totally evil, and the revolutionary as totally good. To do anything else undermines the morale of the Revolution. Picturing the enemy as totally evil means that the enemy must be totally destroyed. At least this is the image that is needed until victory is won. There may indeed be forgiveness and reconciliation later, but for the present, the morale of the Revolution must be maintained.

### *The Competent Authority*

Since revolutionaries do not enjoy legal authority, they can only claim social support from the people. There is no way that they can prove that they have this support, and that becomes a problem for them. They deal with their problem by attempting to demonstrate that the legal authorities do not have social support. One way they can demonstrate this is by terrorizing the public into denying this support to the legal Government, and then claiming to have this support themselves.

### *Just Conduct of the Revolution*

Since the end tends to justify nearly every means, revolutionaries do not feel obligated to deal with just conduct. This creates a problem for the legal authorities, for they cannot use the same methods without injuring their own cause. Some of the problems that emerge in a revolution in regard to methods have to do with terrorism, noncombatants, and torture.

## *Terrorism*

Acts of terrorism are used against the Government and the people. The purpose of terrorism is to undermine the morale of the regular military forces, and to demonstrate to the people that the regular military forces cannot protect them. The goal is to get the people to change sides. If the Government resorts to terrorism, it only tends to alienate the people from them. This gives the revolutionaries even more reasons why the present Government should be overthrown.

## *Noncombatants*

Revolutionaries do not make distinctions between soldiers and civilians. They fight from behind and between the people. Everyone, including children and the elderly, must be considered as combatants. The whole people make up the fighting force. Thus soldiers are not only those who bear arms and wear uniforms, but everyone who takes sides in the struggle. This makes it difficult for the Government, for it can no longer distinguish between friend and enemy. Both sides are not playing by the same rules.

## *Torture*

The revolutionaries do not have to use torture as much as the Government does, but they can more easily accuse the Government of using inhumane methods of torture. Revolutionaries find it easy to follow government movements, but the Government finds it extremely difficult to locate the revolutionaries. Thus whenever revolutionaries are captured, one method of discovering their hiding places is to torture them. All this works to the advantage of the revolutionaries, and tends to alienate the people from the Government and the regular soldiers.

## **Political Assassinations**

### *New Testament Injunctions*

Occasionally it is believed that the removal of the ruler would be sufficient to deal with a problem within a country; but the traditional view, that God ordains rulers, makes this difficult. The most important New Testament Scripture supporting this idea is Romans 13:1 (NRSV), where we read: "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God." This may not mean that God has chosen particular leaders, but that God has established that there be Government. It may also mean that the leader is to be responsible to God. Frequently those who desire to disobey the Government in power appeal to Acts 5:29 (NRSV), where we read: "We must obey God

rather than any human authority.” However one may try to interpret Acts 5:29, it does not mean that one has the right to kill the ruler. This passage concerns disobedience in matters of faith, and does not seem to be talking about overthrowing the Government or killing the ruler.

### *Assassination of the Ruler*

Not very many people have tried to argue for the right to assassinate a ruler. The first one to do so was John of Salisbury (12<sup>th</sup> century). He defined a tyrant as one who governs outside of the law, and argued that it was the responsibility of the Pope to remove him from his office. If the Pope could not do it, then someone else would have to. Who should it be? Only a person selected by God should do it. Our problem today is not very different from the problem of that day. How do we know whether or not God is selecting us, or anyone else, to assassinate the ruler.

John Calvin tried to solve the problem by suggesting that it is the responsibility of a lesser magistrate, but that he can only act on the basis of agreement with other lesser magistrates. One is not to act alone. However, Calvin only suggests disobeying the ruler in regard to matters of Faith, and he insists that we must obey even bad rulers. One of his most important passages is taken from a sermon on Daniel 6, where Calvin writes:

We must obey our princes who are set over us, but when they rise against God they must be put down and held of no more account than worn out shoes.... The princes are so intoxicated and bewitched that they think the world was made for them. When they seek to tear God from his throne can they be respected? When we disobey princes to obey him we do no wrong.<sup>1</sup>

Later some of Calvin’s followers developed what they called the “Covenant of Justice.” This covenant says that the right to rule is a covenant between God, the ruler, and the people. Rulers are not only responsible to God, but also to the people; and if they break the covenant, the people have a right to overthrow them.

### *Secularization and the Ruler*

In most modern states the divine right to rule is rejected, and so most modern rulers govern as a result of *power* and *usefulness*. If rulers are useful to the people and can maintain sufficient power, they will not

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<sup>1</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, p. 160.



likely be removed from office. This does make assassination more likely than in former times. It means that rulers need not only legal authority to maintain their power, but they also need the social support of the people.

## **International Organization**

### *Cooperation or Government*

The United Nations was formed to control international disorder and conflict. Some believe this can only be done if the United Nations develops into some kind of world Government, while others believe it should only be an attempt to get the nations of the world to cooperate. At the present time the United Nations only aims at cooperation, but this also makes it less effective than it might be. One reason for its inability to succeed is the national interests of the larger nations. They are not willing to give up their power when it is against their own national interests to do so.

### *The National Interest*

Many things can be defined as the national interest. What is important is that all nations act on the basis of what they call their national interest. The national interest must be defined in terms of territorial integrity (self-defense against aggressors), economic integrity (preservation of economic institutions), and political integrity (national independence). When any of these three things are threatened, it is in the national interest of the nation to defend itself against those who threaten it.

### *The Balance of Power*

In the absence of real authority by the United Nations, how do nations maintain peace in the world? They do so through what has been called the balance of power. There are a number of nations with enough power to prevent any single nation from dominating the rest. Some of these nations may not have developed much in the way of military power, but they do possess the economic power to make them potential powers. It is not military power alone that makes a nation strong, but its ability to produce the modern weaponry that is needed in modern warfare. This means that one must take into account the economic power of a nation as well.

### *Can We do Nothing?*

Why do we have to do anything? Why not just leave other nations alone? The answer is clear. We live in a global village, where what one

nation does affects others. Martin Niemoeller, at the end of World War II summed it up for individuals, but also for nations:

First, they put the Communists and Jehovah's Witnesses in the concentration camps—but I was not a Communist or a Jehovah's Witness, so I did nothing. Then they came for the Social Democrats—but I was not a Social Democrat, and I did nothing. Then they arrested the trade-unionists—and I did nothing, because I was not one. Then they arrested the Jews—and again I did nothing because I was not a Jew. Then they came for the Catholics, but I was not a Catholic and I did nothing. At last they came and arrested me—but then it was too late already.<sup>1</sup>

### Conclusions

War, not even a Just War, or Just Revolution, is the Intentional Will of God. How then can Christians even be involved in war or revolution? If we are to follow the teachings of Jesus, we would all imitate the early Christians and choose to be pacifists. Why would any Christian ever become a soldier or a revolutionary? Leslie Weatherhead illustrates how a Christian might actually join the military. In his illustration, a father plans his son's career in cooperation with the boy himself.

The will of both may have been, let us say, that the boy should become an architect. Then comes the war. The father is quite willing for his son to be in the armed forces, but a Navy, Army, or Air Force career is only the father's interim or Circumstantial Will for his boy, his will in the circumstances of evil which war has produced. It would only be confusing to speak as if the father's ideal intention and original plan for his son was that the latter spend valuable years of his life in the armed forces.<sup>2</sup>

Does this mean that Christians should only join the military services in war time? It is not only in war time that we face evil. We face evil all the time. While there are vocations incompatible for Christians, the military is not one of them. There are times when Christians should not participate in a war or a revolution, but there are also times when Christians must participate. In such a time, doing nothing (the sin of

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Gabriel Vahanian, "Technology, Politics, and the Christian Faith," *Katallagete*, Winter-Spring, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Leslie D. Weatherhead, *The Will of God* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), pp. 29-30.

omission) in the face of evil may be the greater sin. Dietrich Bonhoeffer illustrated why this is the case: “It is not only my task to look after the victims of madmen who drive a motor-car in a crowded street, but to do all in my power to stop their driving at all.” Sometimes the sin of omission is greater than the sin of commission. This is why we need to apply *just war principles* as best we can, knowing that no war can be called *just*.



## 12. THE CHURCH

**Be the Body of Christ: The Intentional Will of God  
Build up the Church: The Circumstantial Will of God**

*The goal of the church is  
“the increase among men of the love of God  
and neighbor.”<sup>1</sup>*

**H. Richard Niebuhr**

*What may we reasonably believe to be God’s design  
in raising up the [people] called Methodists?  
Not to form any new sect; but to reform the nation,  
particularly the Church;  
and to spread scriptural holiness over the land.*

**John Wesley**

Why bring the Church into a book about Ethics? Because Christianity is a moral faith. We believe in the Law of Moses, the Ten Commandments. We also believe in the two Great Commandments of Jesus, which express the Ten Commandments as positive principles. The ten don’ts are turned into two do’s, which summarize God’s Intentional Will for us. Paul reduces the commandments to one: “Love your neighbor as you love yourself. The church has a moral obligation to be the body of Christ in the world, and to love everyone as Christ loved us.<sup>2</sup> How do we do this? We do it by proclaiming the Gospel. This does not mean that we all become preachers. Francis of Assisi had it right when he said, “Preach the Gospel at all times, and when necessary, use words.”

Notice how the Ten Commandments become two and then one. The one commandment to love the neighbor, including the enemy, does not give any details. It seems more like a principle than like a law, but it calls upon us to truly become part of the body of Christ. We have a moral obligation to let him become our living head and guide his body to proclaim the Gospel through our words and our deeds.

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<sup>1</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1956), p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> John 13:34-35

## **The Commandment**

### *The Source of the Commandment*

The Church as the body of Christ has a commandment of proclamation, which comes from God. This commandment is not a law or a principle, but it is the Intentional Will of God. The Church seeks to obey the Intentional Will of God, not simply the commandment.

The content of this commandment is obligation and permission. The commandment forbids and it permits. It tells Christians what they cannot do, but it also tells Christians what they are obligated to do. The Church's task is to interpret this commandment to the world, but this does not give the Church any privileged position in society. This does not mean that the Church exists under God to lord it over the rest of society.

The Church also lives under the commandment, but cannot force others to obey the commandment. The Church does indeed proclaim what it means to live under the commandment, but the Church can never dominate. The primary task of the Church is that of proclamation and example.

### *The Aim of the Commandment*

One cannot possibly know ahead of time what God is going to command, but one can have an idea as to what God's intention might be. The commandment comes to us in a double form, and reveals God's aim: Love God and Love your neighbor, including your enemy.

The first thing that must be said about the commandment is that it has no power to command anyone to love. Love cannot be commanded. "A command to love is about as fruitless an injunction as can be conceived. One cannot love by telling himself he ought to love; love is not willed."<sup>1</sup> We are only able to love God or our neighbor as we have experienced love ourselves. God loves us in Jesus Christ. This enables us to love others.

The second thing that can be said about the intention of the commandment is that it always expects us to do more than is required. This

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<sup>1</sup> Albert Terrill Rasmussen, *Christian Social Ethics* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1956), p. 164.

is the very nature of love. Emil Brunner has written, “Love can only do more, it can never do less than justice requires.”<sup>1</sup>

While we do not always know exactly what we must do in advance, we do know that we are to act on the basis of what is necessary, and that the intention of our action is to express love in the situation. In order to act in such a way, we first need to know that God loves us. Knowing this enables us to love others and thus fulfill the commandment. We know about God’s love for us from the life and work of Jesus Christ.

### *The Context of the Commandment*

The difficulty with obeying the commandment as it comes to us is the fact that sometimes we have to do things that do not seem to be right or good. Sometimes we have to choose who is more worthy of our love. In the last chapter I mentioned Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s example of a drunken driver who endangers the lives of others. He must be stopped, and the way in which we might have to stop him may not appear to be right or good. Failing to stop him means that we do not express love for those he might injure. Bonhoeffer says that responsible action demands a love that is ready to incur guilt in order to save. We may have to incur guilt in order to love. The context alone determines what might have to be done, and it is God’s Will that we do what must be done. The main aim of the commandment is not “Don’t murder!”<sup>2</sup> but “Love your neighbor!” If we feel that we are violating the commandment that says, “Don’t murder” it will be helpful for us to remember that God also forgives. The positive aspect of the commandment is more important than the negative aspect, but we should be very careful about excusing the violation of the negative.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Emil Brunner, *Justice and the Social Order* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1945), p. 129.

<sup>2</sup> The best translation for the sixth commandment is, “Do not murder.” (Exodus 20:13)

<sup>3</sup> A modern example of Bonhoeffer’s example might be the necessity of shooting down a hijacked airplane before it completes its suicide mission of crashing into a building, such as the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, killing thousands of people. It is better that hundreds die than thousands.

## **Proclaim the Gospel!**

### *The Primary Aim of Proclamation*

First we should say that proclaiming the Gospel is not the same as preaching, but in the Protestant tradition *preaching* has been stressed more than any other means of proclamation. In the Catholic tradition the Lord's Supper (The Mass) has been stressed more than preaching. The primary aim of both methods is the same. That aim is to proclaim to the world that Jesus is Lord, and that God has revealed himself through him to all humankind. This means that the Church has the task of calling the whole world to submit to the Lordship of Christ. The source of this primary aim of proclamation comes from Matthew 28:19-20 (NRSV):

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

### *The Secondary Aim of Proclamation*

Sometimes we confuse the proclamation of the Lordship of Christ with the building up of his Church. Building up his Church is important, but it is not the primary aim of the Gospel. Inserted in the middle of the above passage are the words: "...baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 28:19, NRSV) There is no question but that Christians are also to establish communities among those who accept Christ as Lord, but we should not confuse the establishment of Churches with the proclamation of Christ as Lord. We should aim at expanding our size, but only as fast as we actually win people to the Lordship of Christ. These are the only people who make up the true Church, the Body of Christ. Simply baptizing people and building buildings does not mean that the Church is successful in its task of proclaiming the Lordship of Christ in the world. John Wesley insisted that Methodists ought to have little to do with building preaching houses, and nothing to do with building palaces. He explains why:

Let all preaching-houses be built plain and decent; but not more expensive than is absolutely unavoidable: Otherwise the necessity of raising money will make rich men necessary to us. But if so, we must be dependent upon them, yea, and governed



by them. And then farewell to the Methodist discipline, if not doctrine too.<sup>1</sup>

## **Proclaim Social Justice!**

### *The Meaning of Justice*

Justice has already been defined. Therefore it is only necessary to review that definition. There are basically two kinds of justice. There is penal justice, in which all persons are treated equally before the law; and there is distributive justice, which is an attempt to share the fruits of society with persons according to their needs and responsibilities.

Within this second kind of justice there emerge three other concepts. They are equality, liberty, and order. All persons are to be treated equally, but not all persons have the same needs. Thus, all persons are to share in the fruit of society according to their needs, and they also bear certain responsibilities according to what they have received. The more one receives, the more responsible one becomes. Everyone deserves a certain amount of liberty, but a person's liberty to seek secondary needs should never prevent another from obtaining primary needs. When one person's desire for secondary needs prevents another from obtaining adequate food, clothing, and shelter, then that person has gone beyond his or her right to possess liberty. A third concept that is necessary to maintain justice is order. Without order, it is not possible to maintain the necessary tension between equality and liberty.

### *The Seeking of Justice*

Proclaiming justice does not only mean preaching about it. This indeed may be the place where the Church must begin. We have to become aware of the injustices in the world, but we have to move quickly beyond talking about them. It is also questionable as to whether the clergy should be doing all the leading. Clergy certainly should be involved, but the whole attempt may be more successful if lay persons take the lead in establishing justice. It is, however, the clergy's job to make lay persons aware of the problems. Once the problems have been identified, there is a simple but difficult process that needs to be followed.

The process consists of three steps. The first step is that of organization. Everyone who suffers from the particular injustice needs to be organized, at least as many people as possible. The second step consists

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<sup>1</sup> John Wesley, (1872). *The Works of John Wesley* (Third Edition., Vol. 8, p. 332). London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room.

of education. After the people are organized, they must learn as much as they can about both sides of the problem. It is important for them to understand the other side of the issue so that they do not make unrealistic demands on those who represent the other side. This could make their suffering even worse. The final step has to do with action. They must decide to act, and they must act together. If the group is too much divided, their action will lose too much power. If they can act together as a group, they will have sufficient power to obtain at least an approximate justice. While this may not be what they expect at the time, it is at least one step along the way to a more just society. This of course is their ultimate aim.

### **Proclaim the Gospel**

The Church can best proclaim the Gospel and Social Justice by becoming an example to the world. It must demonstrate that it takes its own message with the utmost seriousness. We have been more interested in baptizing new members and building new church buildings than in loving and nurturing people. Bonhoeffer suggests that the only way we can regain the respect of the world is to do the following:

The Church is her true self only when she exists for humanity. As a fresh start she should give away all her endowments to the poor and needy. The clergy should live solely on the free-will offerings of their congregations, or possibly engage in some secular calling. She must take part in the social life of the world, not lording over men, but helping and serving them.

### **Conclusions**

The church has a moral obligation to be the Church and to proclaim through its own words and deeds that Jesus Christ is Lord. In his book, *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*, Paul Brand illustrates the need for people to be the body of Christ:

After World War II German students volunteered to help rebuild a cathedral in England, one of many casualties of the Luftwaffe bombings. As the work progressed, debate broke out on how to best restore a large statue of Jesus with His arms outstretched and bearing the familiar inscription, "Come unto Me." Careful patching could repair all damage to the statue except for Christ's hands, which had been destroyed by bomb fragments. Should they attempt the delicate task of reshaping those hands? Finally the workers reached a decision that still

stands today. The statue of Jesus has no hands, and the inscription now reads, “Christ has no hands but ours.”<sup>1</sup>

Long before these students came to their conclusion, Saint Teresa of Avilla came to a similar conclusion when she wrote, “Christ has no body now on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which the compassion of Christ is to look out on a hurting world.”<sup>2</sup>

Robert Fulghum illustrates a similar idea with a story about Alexander Papaderos, a doctor of philosophy, teacher, and politician, who came to believe that the Germans and Cretans had much to give one another—and much to learn from one another. If they could forgive one another and construct a creative relationship, then anyone could.

Fulghum went to hear Papaderos speak on the Island of Crete. After he finished his lecture, Papaderos asked if there were any questions. Fulghum asked, “Dr. Papaderos, what is the meaning of life?” The usual laughter followed but Papaderos said, “I will answer your question.” He took his wallet out of his hip pocket, where he found a very small round mirror, about the size of a quarter. Then he said,

When I was a small child, during the war, we were very poor and we lived in a remote village. One day, on the road, I found the broken pieces of a mirror. A German motorcycle had been wrecked in that place.

I tried to find all the pieces and put them together, but it was not possible, so I kept only the largest piece. This one. And by scratching it on a stone I made it round. I began to play with it as a toy and became fascinated by the fact that I could reflect light into dark places where the sun would never shine—in deep holes and crevices and dark closets. It became a game for me to get light into the most inaccessible places I could find.

I kept the little mirror, and as I went about my growing up, I would take it out in idle moments and continue the challenge of the game. As I became a man, I grew to understand that this was not just a child’s game but a metaphor for what I might do

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Brand, *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), p. 206.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in *The Upper Room Disciplines*, 2000, p. 46.

with my life. I came to understand that I am not the light or the source of light. But light—truth, understanding, knowledge—is there, and it will only shine in many dark places if I reflect it.

I am a fragment of a mirror whose whole design and shape I do not know. Nevertheless, with what I have I can reflect light into the dark places of this world—into the black places in the hearts of men—and change some things in some people. Perhaps others may see and do likewise. This is what I am about. This is the meaning of my life.”

And then he took his small mirror and, holding it carefully, caught the bright rays of daylight streaming through the window and reflected them onto Fulghum’s face and hands folded on the desk.<sup>1</sup>

These stories illustrate the theology and morality of the Church. The Church can never use force, nor can it manipulate people to unite with the body of Christ. People must come to Christ of their own free will. This is the moral commandment under which the Church as the body of Christ operates, and this is the Light the world needs to see.

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<sup>1</sup> Robet Fulghum, *It Was On Fire When I Lay Down On It* (New York: Ivy Books, 1989), pp. 171-175.

## CONCLUSIONS

Ethics is the fruit of theology. It is not enough to base one's ethics on the law, nor is it enough to base one's ethics on principles. Frequently, we will do both. To say that the context determines our moral action is too simplistic. There are times when we will be guided by one or more of these three building blocks of morality: law, principles, and context. Love may well be the primary ethical principle, but justice is the way in which we love people we don't even know.

We all have to live in our contemporary culture. At times certain elements of the Kingdom of God seem to be present in our culture. When that is the case, it's easy to see the presence of Christ in our culture, but there are also times when our culture clearly contradicts the Kingdom of God. Whenever that happens, we must stand against culture. Dietrich Bonhoeffer's reaction to the German Church during World War II is a good example. He opposed not the German Church, but those elements in it that had to be rejected. To do nothing was a sin of omission.

Sometimes it is okay to support contemporary culture because it is conforming to the Intentional Will of God; but at other times, it must be rejected. At such times, we will have to follow the Circumstantial Will of God as we oppose the evil we find in culture. This leads us to the middle position, which is to transform culture, making it consistent with the Intentional Will of God. To do this we must avoid the ditch on the right and the ditch on the left.

As we evaluate Scripture, with its laws and principles, looking at the context in which we live, our conclusions will vary. Transforming culture is no easy task, for we will always have to confront those who oppose our attempt to make culture consistent with what Jesus calls the Kingdom of God.

Just what is this Kingdom of God? One could say that Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 describes it best for life in this world, and Revelation 21 to 22 describes it best for life in the New Jerusalem or the New Heaven and the New Earth. If we are ever to understand Jesus' prayer, "Thy Kingdom come, on earth as it is in Heaven," then we will have to begin using our spiritual senses and our spiritual disciplines. Our theology must evolve as we make moral decisions.

My primary interest is, and always has been, in Christian Theology and Social Ethics. Without question I have to rely on the Scriptures,

both the Old and New Testaments, for my understanding of Jesus and his theological and moral teachings. This also means that I have to depend on those persons who wrote Scripture. Do their writings interpret what Jesus really said and meant?

As I wrote about marriage, race relations, class or status, economics, political organization, war and revolution, and finally the church itself, my purpose was to be faithful to Scripture, even when Scripture conflicted with my own reason and experience. There are many other areas of life besides these. My purpose was not to write about everything, but to illustrate how difficult it is to make moral decisions. Frequently our moral choices are not between good and evil, but between the lesser of two evils, or the greater good. That's precisely when we need our spiritual senses most and when we should be exercising our spiritual disciplines.<sup>1</sup>

With your grace you feed us,  
with your light now lead us,  
unite us as one in this life that we share.<sup>2</sup>

I'd like to hear from you. I don't consider these to be my last words on the subjects with which I am dealing. I am constantly making corrections, adding material to the book, and sometimes deleting material no longer relevant. You can obtain my latest update from my website.

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<sup>1</sup> In my book, *Our Spiritual Senses*, I named senses as the rational, common, emotional, moral, and volitional senses. In my book, *Our Spiritual Exercises*, I named six exercises, which are: (1) Public Worship, (2) Bible Study, (3) Secret Prayer, (4) Holy Communion, (5) Secret Giving, and (6) Secret Fasting.

<sup>2</sup> Omer Westendorf, "Sent Forth by God's Blessing," *The United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), #664.

# **APPENDICES**

# ETHICS AND MORALS

## ETHICS

1. A set of principles of right conduct.
2. A theory or a system of moral values.
3. The study of the general nature of morals and of the specific moral choices to be made by a person; moral philosophy.
4. The rules or standards governing the conduct of a person or the members of a profession: medical ethics.

## MORALS

1. Of or concerned with the judgment of the goodness or badness of human action and character: moral scrutiny; a moral quandary.
2. Teaching or exhibiting goodness or correctness of character and behavior: a moral lesson.
3. Conforming to standards of what is right or just in behavior; virtuous: a moral life.
4. Arising from conscience or the sense of right and wrong: a moral obligation.
5. Having psychological rather than physical or tangible effects: a moral victory; moral support.
6. Based on strong likelihood or firm conviction, rather than on the actual evidence: a moral certainty.

*American Heritage Dictionary*



# ETHICS AND MORALS

## DEFINITIONS

**ETHICS:** (Noun) A set of moral principles, esp. ones relating to or affirming a specified group, field, or form of conduct: the puritan ethic was being replaced by the hedonist ethic.

**ETHICS:** (Adjective) (Rare) of or relating to moral principles or the branch of knowledge dealing with these.

**MORALS:** (Noun) A person's standards of behavior or beliefs concerning what is and is not acceptable for them to do.

Standards of behavior that are considered good or acceptable.

**MORALS:** (Adjective) Concerned with the principles of right and wrong behavior and the goodness or badness of human character.

Concerned with or adhering to the code of interpersonal behavior that is considered right or acceptable in a particular society.

## SCHOOLS OF ETHICS

Schools of ethics in Western philosophy can be divided, very roughly, into three sorts.

1. The first, drawing on the work of Aristotle, holds that the **virtues** (such as justice, charity, and generosity) are dispositions to act in ways that benefit both the person possessing them and that person's society.
2. The second defended particularly by Kant, makes the concept of **duty** central to morality: humans are bound, from a knowledge of their duty as rational beings, to obey the categorical imperative to respect other rational beings.
3. Thirdly, **utilitarianism** asserts that the guiding principle of conduct should be the greatest happiness or benefit of the greatest number.

## ETHICAL AND MORAL

You can be an ethical person without necessarily being a moral one, since ethical implies conformity with a code of fair and honest behavior, particularly in business or in a profession; (an ethical legislator who didn't believe in cutting deals), while moral refers to generally accepted standards of goodness and rightness in character and con-

duct—especially sexual conduct: (the moral values she'd learned from her mother).

In the same way, you can be honorable without necessarily being virtuous, since honorable suggests dealing with others in a decent and ethical manner, while virtuous implies the possession of moral excellence in character: (many honorable business people fail to live a virtuous private life).

Righteous is similar in meaning to virtuous but also implies freedom from guilt or blame: (righteous anger); when the righteous person is also somewhat intolerant and narrow-minded, self-righteous might be a better adjective.

Someone who makes a hypocritical show of being righteous is often described as sanctimonious—in other words, acting like a saint without having a saintly character.

# ETHICS 101

## What is the Law?

Happy are those  
who do not follow the advice of the wicked,  
or take the path that sinners tread,  
or sit in the seat of scoffers;  
but their delight is in the law of the LORD,  
and on his law they meditate day and night.

*Psalm 1:1-2*

Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. (Matthew 5:17-18)

Natural Law: Example: Gravity and the building of a safe Bridge  
Social Law: Example: Heavy Traffic  
Moral Law: Examples: The Ten Commandments, and  
The Great Commandment

A lawyer, asked him a question to test him. “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. (Matthew 22:35-40)

Concerning the early Christians: “They obey the laws that men make, but their lives are better than the laws.”<sup>1</sup>

## What are My Principles?

I want a principle within of watchful, godly fear,  
a sensibility of sin, a pain to feel it near.  
I want the first approach to feel  
of pride or wrong desire,  
to catch he wandering of my will,  
and quench the kindling fire.

*Charles Wesley*

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<sup>1</sup> Letter to Diogenetus, quoted in Beach and Niebuhr, *Christian Ethics*, p. 68.



## Treat others as you want to be treated

In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets. (Matthew 7:12)

### **The General Rules**

Do no harm!

Do all the good you can!

Attend all the Ordinances of God

### **The New General Rule**

Private: Devotion & Compassion

Public: Worship and Justice



### **What is the Will of God?**

Take my will, and make it thine; it shall be no longer mine.

Take my heart, it is thine own; it shall be thy royal throne.

Take my love, my Lord, I pour at thy feet its treasure store.

Take myself, and I will be every, only, all for thee.

Frances R. Havergal

But strive first for the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matthew 6:33)

### **The Will of God? (Leslie Weatherhead)**

1. **Intentional Will of God (ideal).** Was it God's intention that Jesus should go to the cross? It was God's intention that men and women should follow Jesus, not kill him. The discipleship of men and women, not the death of Christ, was the Intentional Will of God.

2. **Circumstantial Will of God (in the midst of circumstances).** When the circumstance wrought by human evil set up such a dilemma that Christ was compelled either to die or run away, then, in those circumstances the cross became the Will of God, but only in those circumstances.
3. **Ultimate Will of God (God cannot be defeated).** God's ultimate will cannot be defeated. The same goal would have been reached if the Intentional Will of God could have been carried through without frustration. Not everything is God's Will, but nothing can happen which will finally defeat his will. In regard to the cross, God achieved his final goal not in spite of the cross, but through it.

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. (Matthew 7:21)

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall! (Matthew 7:24-27)

**Attend all the ordinances**  
 Public Worship of God  
 Ministry of the Word  
 Supper of the Lord  
 Family and Private Prayer  
 Searching the Scriptures  
 Fasting or Abstinence

**Attend the Essential Ordinances!**  
 Join a Bible Study  
 Join a Discipleship Group  
 Sunday School Class  
 Youth/Discipleship Group  
 Pray Alone and with Others  
 Attend Public Worship

# **SITUATION ETHICS**

## **Six Fundamental Principles**

1. Love only is always good.
2. Love is the only norm.
3. Love and Justice are the same.
4. Love is not liking.
5. Love justifies the means.
6. Love decides there and then.

(Agape is more intellectual than physical/emotional)

# THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

## **FIRST TABLET** *“Your Relationship to God”*

1. You shall not have any other gods before me.
2. You shall not make a graven image.
3. You shall not take the name of the Lord, your God, in vain.
4. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

## **SECOND TABLET** *“Your Relationship to Others”*

5. Honor your father and your mother.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
10. You shall not covet.

## THE TWO TABLES OF THE LAW

### THE FIRST TABLET (Exodus 20:3-11)

**Deuteronomy 6:4:** “The LORD is our God, the LORD alone.”

**Mark 12:29b:** “The Lord our God, the Lord is one”

**Deuteronomy 6:5:** “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.”

**Mark 12:30:** “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.”

1. Worship no god but me. (The Only God)
2. Do not make for yourselves images. (The Invisible God)
3. Do not use my name for evil purposes. (God’s Sacred Name)
4. Observe the Sabbath and keep it holy. (God’s Special Day)

### THE SECOND TABLET (Exodus 20:12-17)

**Leviticus 19:18b:** “...you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

**Mark 12:31:** “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

5. Respect your father and your mother. (The Sacredness of Parents)
6. Do not commit murder. (The Sacredness of Life)
7. Do not commit adultery. (The Sacredness of Marriage)
8. Do not steal. (The Sacredness of Property)
9. Do not accuse anyone falsely. (The Sacredness of Truth)
10. Do not covet. (The Sacred Desire)

**The Golden Rule:** “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.” (Matthew 7:12)



# THE TEN COMMANDMENTS COMPARED

One God, a Sabbath, and a Moral Code

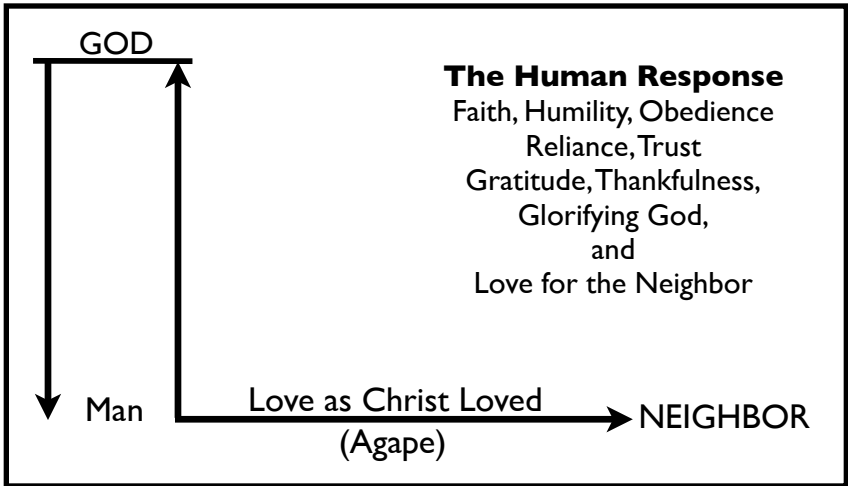
Exodus 20:1-17

| JEWISH/PROTESTANT   | CATHOLIC/LUTHERAN                 |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| 1. One God (20:2-3) Jewish<br>One God (20:2) Protestant       | 1. One God (20:2-6)               |
| 2. No Images (20:4-6) Jewish<br>No Images (20:3-6) Protestant | 2. No Blasphemy (20:7)            |
| 3. No Blasphemy (20:7)  | 3. Observe the Sabbath (20:8-11)  |
| 4. Observe the Sabbath (20:8-11)                              | 4. Respect Parents (20:12)        |
| 5. Respect Parents (20:12)                                    | 5. No Murder (20:13)              |
| 6. No Murder (20:13)  | 6. No Adultery (20:14)            |
| 7. No Adultery (20:14)  | 7. No Stealing (20:14)            |
| 8. No Stealing (20:15)  | 8. No False Swearing (20:16)      |
| 9. No False Swearing (20:16)                                  | 9. No Coveting a wife (20:17a)    |
| 10. No Coveting (20:17)                                       | 10. No Coveting Property (20:17b) |

## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS CONTRASTED

| Revelation through Moses   |                                       | Revelation through Jesus   |   |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| Ye<br>have<br>heard<br>that<br>it<br>was<br>said<br>by<br>them<br>of<br>old<br>time, | One God<br>(Exodus 20:2-3)            | <b>but</b><br><br><b>I</b><br><br><b>say</b><br><br><b>unto</b><br><br><b>you.</b> | God is Father<br>(Matthew 6:9)            |
|  | No Images<br>(Exodus 20:4-6)          |  | God is Spirit and Truth<br>(John 4:23-24) |
|  | No Blasphemy<br>(Exodus 20:7)         |  | Hallow God's Name<br>(Matthew 6:9)        |
|  | Man for the Sabbath<br>(Exodus 20:8)  |  | The Sabbath for Man<br>(Mark 2:27-28)     |
|  | Honor your Parents<br>(Exodus 20:12)  |  | Honor your Family<br>(Mark 3:32-35)       |
|  | No Murder<br>(Exodus 20:13)           |  | No Anger<br>(Matthew 5:21)                |
|  | No Adultery<br>(Exodus 20:14)         |  | No Lust<br>(Matthew 5:27)                 |
|  | No Stealing<br>(Exodus 20:15)         |  | Give Freely<br>(Matthew 5:42)             |
|  | No False Witnessing<br>(Exodus 20:16) |  | Tell the Truth<br>(Matthew 5:33-37)       |
|  | No Coveting<br>(Exodus 20:17)         |  | Covet Righteousness<br>(Matthew 5:6)      |

# THE GREAT COMMANDMENTS



# **HOLINESS**

## **The Hebrew Scriptures**

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.

### **Leviticus 19:1-2**

## **The Christian Scriptures**

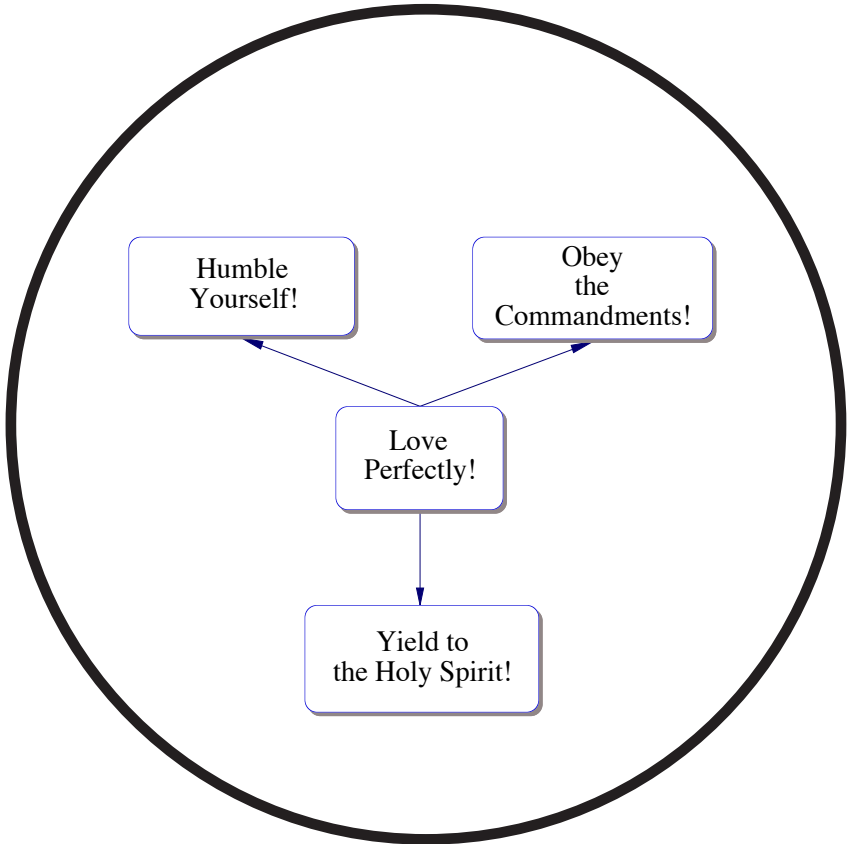
“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

### **Matthew 5:43-48**

Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

### **1 Peter 1:14-16**

# HOLINESS



**The Guiding Principle of Christian Ethics**  
(Leviticus 19:1-2 and 1 Peter 1:14-16)

# THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

## Creation

God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. *Genesis 1:27*

## Holiness Code

Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them; You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy. *Leviticus 19:2*

You shall not take vengeance or bear a rudge against any of your people, you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord. *Leviticus 19:18*

## Sermon on the Mount

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven. *Matthew 5:44-45*

Be perfect (holy), therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect (holy). *Matthew 5:48*

Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness. *Matthew 6:33*

“Those who do not seek the Kingdom of God first do not seek it at all.” *Richard Foster*

“A lukewarm Christian is no Christian at all.” (Revelation 3:16) *William Barclay*



# THE PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE

God created humankind in his image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.

*Genesis 1:27*



## **PROCREATION**

### *Function of Marriage*

God blessed them,  
and said to them,  
“Be fruitful and multiply,  
and fill the earth....”

*Genesis 1:28*

## **FELLOWSHIP**

### *Form of Marriage*

Then the Lord God said,  
“It is not good that the man  
should be alone; I will make  
him a helper as his partner.”

*Genesis 2:18*

### *Form follows Function*

Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother  
and clings to his wife,  
and they become one flesh.

*Genesis 2:24*

# MEDICAL ETHICS

## The Task of Medicine

1. To save life
2. To heal disease
3. To alleviate pain
4. To reduce the ill effects of incurable diseases
5. To prevent sickness and to improve the quality of physical life

## Some Questions

1. Should we control pregnancies? If so, under what circumstances?
  - a) By natural means
  - b) By artificial means
  - c) By abortion
2. What medical technologies are appropriate to create new life?
  - a) Artificial Insemination
  - b) Cloning
3. When does life begin?
  - a) At conception
  - b) When there is a heart beat (25<sup>th</sup> day)
  - c) When there is brain activity (8<sup>th</sup> week)
  - d) When all the essential organs are present (8<sup>th</sup> week)
  - e) At birth
4. What should be done if a fetus is abnormal?
  - a) Should the pregnancy be terminated?
  - b) Who should bear the financial cost?
5. Should organs be transplanted? If so, which ones?
  - a) How do we choose the recipients?
  - b) Who should bear the cost?
6. Is suicide or euthanasia ever a moral option?
7. When does life end?
  - a) When one stops breathing?
  - b) When one's heart stops beating?
  - c) When brain activity ceases?



## OTHER BOOKS WRITTEN BY THE AUTHOR

### BIBLE STUDY GUIDES

1. **The Bible as Sacred History:**  
Survey of the Bible
2. **The Struggle with God:**  
Genesis through Deuteronomy
3. **Sacred Stories:**  
Joshua through Esther
4. **The Search for Wisdom:**  
Job through Ecclesiastes
5. **Time is Running Out:**  
Major and Minor Prophets
6. **Between the Testaments:**  
Books of the Apocrypha
7. **The Messengers:**  
The Four Gospels
8. **An Explosion of Faith:**  
Acts and Revelation
9. **The First E-Letters:**  
All of the Letters
10. **The Second Creation:**  
Revelation (Formatted: 6x9)
11. **A Vision of Hope:**  
Revelation: (Formatted 8.5x11)
12. **New Testament Photos 1**
13. **New Testament Photos 2**

### BOOKS

1. **Ignited for Mission:**  
A Call to Missions
2. **Reformulating the Mission of the Church:**  
A Theology of Missions
3. **Our Spiritual Senses:**  
Five Spiritual Senses
4. **Our Spiritual Disciplines:**  
Six Spiritual Disciplines
5. **The Ordinary Christian Experience:**  
Fourteen Common Experiences
6. **Faith is a Choice:**  
Choosing Faith and Morality
7. **A Brief Story of the Christian Church:**  
A Survey of the Church
8. **The Heart of Methodism:**  
Renewing the Church
9. **The Light:**  
Our Moral Compass

### EDITED BY THE AUTHOR

1. **Foundational Documents:**  
Basic Methodist Documents
2. **Instructions for Children:**  
by John Wesley
3. **Speaking Iban:**  
by Burr Baughman
4. **The Essentials of Methodism:**  
Basic Methodist Beliefs

