THIRD EDITION

An Introduction to BIBLICAL ETHICS

WALKING IN THE WAY OF WISDOM

Robertson McQuilkin
and Paul Copan

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IVP Academic
An imprint of InterVarsity Press
Downers Grove, Illinois

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InterVarsity Press
P.O. Box 1400, Downers Grove, IL 60515-1426
World Wide Web: www.ivpress.com
Email: email@ivpress.com

Third edition: ©2014 by Robertson McQuilkin and Paul Copan
Second edition: ©1995 by Robertson McQuilkin
First edition: ©1984 by Robertson McQuilkin

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First and second editions published by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois, USA.

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Interior design: Beth Hagenberg
Images: Homeless person: Tobias Helbig/Getty Images
Towel and basin: © Sterlsev/iStockphoto
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ISBN 978-0-8308-6481-2 (digital)
ISBN 978-0-8308-2818-0 (print)

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Dedication (from Paul Copan)

To my loving wife, Jacqueline,
whose gentle and wise spirit radiates
the glory and presence of God
and is a daily encouragement and inspiration
to me and our children.

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Preface

Columbia International University president emeritus, Robertson McQuilkin, wrote *An Introduction to Biblical Ethics,* which was first published by Tyndale in 1989. This book has had a good run over the course of two editions, and it has been translated into a number of languages, including Korean, German and Amharic. Twenty-eight years ago, I (Paul) had read this non-published manuscript by McQuilkin as a textbook in his class at what is now Columbia International University. This book made a remarkable impact on me and helped guide my thinking on many ethical questions.

Roberston McQuilkin and I stayed in contact over the years, writing to each other and visiting with one another from time to time. In June 2009, "Mr. McQuilkin" (as I still call him), wrote an email to me, requesting my advice. Hoping to extend the life of the book, he asked about a possible coauthor to revise the book with him. In his note, he said that his objective in conceiving and writing this ethics book was not merely that it be true to Scripture; he wanted to actually *start* with Scripture to deal with ethical issues in the Bible itself as well as with contemporary ethical issues in light of Scripture, structuring his work around the Ten Commandments. However, he was skeptical that he could find an ethicist willing to revise the book with him and whom he could fully endorse.

So I wrote back to him, informing him that his book had been a marvelous resource to me over the years. I mentioned that I taught ethics, of which he was unaware. In somewhat parallel fashion, I myself had written a philosophy of religion book, *Loving Wisdom: Christian Philosophy of Re-*

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ligion (Chalice), which had the identical goal: to begin with and extensively engage the Scriptures to articulate and defend philosophically the coherence of the Christian metanarrative (God, creation, fall, redemption, re-creation). Having the same vision as he, I expressed a willingness to go in with him on this project.

He immediately replied: "if you do ethics, too, I can think of no one I'd rather bequeath this project to! I think the book has had a unique niche and, from what you say, still could. Maybe my query to you was a 'God-thing'!"

This book has required updating and expansion in places. We have added material on topics ranging from utilitarianism and evolutionary ethics to gay marriage to bioethical issues such as plastic surgery, transsexualism and surrogate motherhood. Obviously, this book is an expression of agreement between the authors regarding much material on biblical ethics. A few differences remain, as will be evident, but it has been a joy to engage in discussion. In various portions of the book, you will see "McQuilkin's Perspective" and "Copan's Perspective" headings. We consider this feature of the book to be a virtue: it shows a range of acceptable views within evangelicalism and that people who disagree at secondary points can still work together beneficially and amicably.

We would like to thank Jacqueline Copan, Peter Payne, Michael Austin, Cristian Mihut and Francis Beckwith for their valuable insights. We are also indebted to our friends at InterVarsity Press: Jeff Crosby for his friendship over the years and his enthusiastic support for this and other IVP writing endeavors; Andy LePeau for his friendship, graciousness and wise guidance about this project; and Kristie Berglund for her superb editing skills. We are very grateful for all you have done to bring this book to a third edition. Thanks also to CIU's Roy King for putting together the Instructor's Guide to accompany this volume, aiding professors or teachers who use this book as a text in their classroom.

It is a high privilege to team up with my former professor and mentor in this book endeavor. Both of us pray that God will use this book to guide Christians in living wisely, helping to give clearer shape to loving God and loving others before a watching world. It is also our hope that,

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through this book, believers in a relativistic, cynical age will not only be better able to winsomely and courageously articulate the joy and blessing of the Scriptures' life-giving demands and of conformity to the image of Christ. We pray too that they will demonstrate through their lives the wisdom, goodness and beauty of "walking in the ways of the Lord."

Paul Copan
Robertson McQuilkin
August 2013

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Introduction

Biblical Ethics and Living Wisely

Ethics (from the Greek word *ethos*) might be called a system of moral values, virtues and duties. It has to do with ideal human character, actions and ends. What ought a person do or refrain from doing? What attitudes, behavior and qualities should be viewed as good? And *why* should they be considered good? What is the highest good, "the chief end of man," the purpose of human existence? These are the questions the study of ethics seeks to answer.

Since the time of the Enlightenment (1650–1800), however, *ethics* has been separated from *theology* in an effort to separate the sacred and the secular, and now we find ourselves in the midst of a crisis about the foundation of ethics. We've all heard atheists claiming that "we can be good without God," that "we don't need the Bible to know right from wrong," that we should be "good for goodness' sake." True, non-believers can both *know* and *do* good things, even though alienated from God. But this hardly begins to address the crisis, let alone show how goodness could emerge in a Godless world. The ultimate answer to this moral crisis is the existence of a good, personal God, in whose image humans have been made and who serves as the basis for objective ethics, duties, human rights and personal dignity; and this God has most clearly revealed his very character and will in the person and ministry as well as the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Attempting to remove God from the picture of reality in an effort to formulate "secular" ethical systems has helped create

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the crisis in the first place. We will return to this point.

There are many approaches to discovering answers to these questions of ethics, but the approach of this book is turning to Scripture and, as best we can, examining biblical texts and contexts dealing with each ethical question discussed. We do this, first, because of the conviction that the Bible is a divine revelation and thus *a source of genuine knowledge* for human beings—not mere "preferences" or "personal values." It gives us true guidance for living wise and faithful lives—guidance that includes *moral facts.* Let us not fall into the trap of compartmentalizing public *facts* from private *values,* as our society so often does. Second, while some differentiate between the more theoretical and philosophical term *ethics* and the more specific category of *morality* as referring to specific customs, habits and taboos, we will use these terms interchangeably. Third, we have confidence that the Bible is trustworthy in what it affirms. Though we may utilize other sources for assistance in understanding and applying biblical truth, we shall treat the Bible as our final authority. And we will seek to apply biblical principles as well as direct mandates, but we will attempt to go only as far as Scripture itself goes and maintain the emphases of the Bible itself. So we call our study *biblical ethics.*

James asks, "Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom" (Jas 3:13). Thus, this book is concerned with *living wisdom*—living wisely, or living out wisdom, which begins with the fear of the Lord (Ps 111:10). By submitting to God as our authority, we begin to walk in the way of wisdom. What's more, the incarnate Christ is the very embodiment of God's wisdom (1 Cor 1:30; Col 2:3). As the "second Adam" (Rom 5; 1 Cor 15), he comes to restore a fallen human race by creating a new, redeemed humanity—a community that is being shaped into his image as part of the new creation (2 Cor 3:18; 5:17; Gal 4:19).

"An Introduction," as part of the title, implies that the study of any given ethical issue will not be exhaustive. Nevertheless, we will attempt to be comprehensive in two ways. First, we will attempt to highlight the key elements involved so that students of biblical ethics may expand their understanding through additional study based on what is found herein.

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At the end of each chapter is recommended reading for further study. Second, we will attempt to survey, as best as we can, what we consider to be essential ethical issues, classical and contemporary, personal and social. Though some divide personal ethics from social ethics, we will seek to integrate them in the conviction that few issues are exclusively personal and that social problems will only be solved by individual people taking responsible action.

Ethics Among the Disciplines

Before noting our methodology, it might prove helpful to pause and observe how ethics relates to other disciplines—philosophy, psychology, sociology, political science and religion—and what the major approaches to ethics have been.

Since *philosophy*—the "love of wisdom"—involves hard thinking about important issues, ethics has traditionally been considered a part of philosophy. Christian ethics, then, would be part of Christian philosophy, or what some include under systematic theology.

When a new ethical problem arises in society, such as gay marriage or sex-change operations, newspaper reporters or TV anchors frequently consult a local professor of *psychology.* In many ways, it would make just as much sense—if not more—to consult the local bartender. Psychology is descriptive and can only tell us, with greater or lesser precision, what the average person does and what may result if averages hold. It lacks any authority to speak of what human behavior *ought* to be. Since it lacks this authority, and since it should hold tentatively any conclusions it reaches, it is properly non-normative in its approach. Many psychologists, however, jump outside their sphere of expertise and assume a non-normative relativism for all people, insisting that it is wrong to say anything is wrong! True enough, psychology may help us understand what produces conflict, but whether we use this information to produce conflict or to allay it will depend on our values embedded within our worldview or philosophy of life. As a matter of historic fact, psychological insights are used by some to create conflict. And this is an ethical problem, not a psychological one. Psychology helps people understand why they do what they do and how

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they may change; ethics tells them what they *ought* to do.

Other behavioral sciences, such as *sociology* and *cultural anthropology,* are similar to psychology. If these disciplines would stick to descriptive science and tell us how societies and cultures function and what seems to result from particular behavior and social arrangements, they would be very useful to politicians and ordinary citizens in understanding themselves and how they might prove more successful in changing the way things are done. But these sciences have become increasingly prescriptive, imposing moral (cultural) relativity or, more recently, certain secular, "politically correct" values. Anthropologists holding such views tend to indiscriminately label Christian missionaries as "imperialistic" and "ethnocentric" (considering one's culture to be superior over another's); this assumes a universal moral prohibition—that ethnocentricity is morally wrong for all people at all times and that it is not simply the expression of the anthropologist's particular culture! Of course, anthropologists or behavioral scientists have every right to sort out and advocate their own values. But they lack any authority deriving from their discipline to speak to ethical issues.

Political science, on the other hand, brings together various disciplines, including the insights of the behavioral sciences and, above all, ethics. The world often suffers because so many politicians choose goals—and the pragmatics of how to accomplish those goals—without ethical controls. Above all, the leader of people should specialize in ethics. The first question should be, what is right? Not, what is in my best interest? Or, what is the current pressure in my constituency? Or, what is possible? The pragmatic is properly the sphere of the politician, and we recognize that negotiation and meeting halfway are often required to avoid gridlock. After all, half a loaf is better than none. For example, a pro-life lawmaker can be grateful for incremental victories to save human lives through legislation that curtails abortion-on-demand (e.g., late-term abortions), even though more work remains to be done. So the behavioral sciences will certainly help him answer questions about how a given goal may best be achieved. But the control in choosing which goal to pursue must be the ethical: we must move beyond the "is" to the "ought."

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Finally, how does *ethics* relate to *religion*? This begs the question of how to define religion. Is religion that which deals with the supernatural—the belief in and service of a god? If so, classical Confucianism can hardly be called a religion as it was purely an ethical system. On the other hand, is ethics an essential part of religion? If so, Japan's Shintoism would not qualify, since it is an amoral set of rituals. The definition of religion is elusive to both scholars and lawmakers, and the sacred-secular divide is a post-Enlightenment mistake since the "secularist" makes ample non-neutral assumptions about the nature of reality, the scope of ethics and the basis of knowledge and rationality. But perhaps traditional religion could be understood as a deeply embedded heart-commitment that is (a) *comprehensive,* (b) *identity-shaping* and (c) *of central importance.* Perhaps we could speak of a "worldview" or an all-encompassing philosophy of life that captures what is at the heart of religion. (This would be true whether one consciously reflects on those embedded convictions and values or not.)

Humans are inescapably religious; they will place ultimate value on something and orient their lives around it, serving one master or another (Mt 6:24). In the words of singer Bob Dylan, "You gotta' serve somebody."[1] Naturally, one's heart-commitment—one's religion—will give shape to moral values, attitudes and conduct. Whether we speak of religion in traditional terms—such as Hinduism or Buddhism—or more broadly as a worldview such as naturalism or atheism, a person will inescapably take a moral point of view. Even the relativist will make an assessment about morality, however inconsistently he holds it. An ethical stance is fundamental to all worldviews, and in part five we will give an overview and assessment of leading ethical theories.

God, Revelation and Ethics

According to Jesus, the sum of our obligation is to love God and to love others (Mt 22:37-40). This is, as one author puts it, "the Jesus Creed."[2] Wisdom is the skill for living rightly, which means that true wisdom is anchored in a correct view of reality. Skillful living begins with being properly aligned with the intrinsically relational, triune God. We start with

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fearing the Lord (Ps 111:10; Prov 1:7), by humbling ourselves before his authority and entering into covenant relation with him. This all-encompassing commitment enables us to view life with increasing clarity that we may live wisely. As C. S. Lewis expressed it: "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else."[3]

God's self-revelation is both *general* (through reason, conscience, creation and human experience) and *special* (Jesus Christ and Scripture). Because humans are made in God's image, they can recognize moral truths even if they do not believe in God. In his *Abolition of Man,* C. S. Lewis took to cataloging moral codes across history and civilizations—Greek, Roman, Hebrew, Babylonian, Chinese, Norse. Remarkably, the *same* kinds of moral laws continue to surface: don't steal; don't bear false witness; don't murder; honor your parents; keep your promises (general revelation). In the Old Testament, God is often judging pagan nations who had no Bible. On what basis does he judge them? Because they violated the moral law within and suppressed their own conscience. They should have known better than to break treaties, rip open pregnant women or deliver a vulnerable people into the hands of their enemies (Amos 1–2).

So even though human sanctity or worth is rooted in God's graciously creating us in his likeness, people who do not believe in God can still get much right morally by attending to their conscience and learning lessons by reflecting on their human experience: How would I like to be treated in that way? Or, what if I were born into a different race, born at a different time, born with a different skin color?

So, yes, the atheist can in some measure "be good without God"—that is, he can *know* right from wrong without believing in God. But the more fundamental question is, how did he come to *be* this way? Where do human worth, moral responsibility and duties come from? The common problem in secular ethical systems is that they focus on *knowing* ethical truths, but they have no *basis* for explaining how intrinsic human worth or moral values and duties could emerge out of a materialistic, impersonal universe. Some ethical systems simply presume that we are moral beings who can act as morally responsible agents. But this stems from our being

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made in God's image—with the capacity to relate to God, to think deeply, to make free choices, to relate intimately with others, to think about the meaning of life, to show creativity and to create culture. Alternate ethical systems typically borrow from the resources of a biblical worldview to sustain themselves. They will assume human dignity and worth, moral responsibility, the capacity to reason—assumptions that are right at home within a biblical outlook.

The believer then has the double advantage of God's general and special self-revelation. Regarding natural revelation, we often have an immediate moral connection with non-Christians (assuming they haven't completely seared their conscience) because some things are morally obvious: it's wrong to torture babies for fun, to rape, or to beat your wife. One doesn't need the Bible to know this since the image of God in us enables us to think and act morally. Yet we have further clarity through special revelation.

When we talk about "biblical ethics," one might ask, Why not focus on "Christian ethics"? As it turns out, Jesus' entrance into the world did not primarily add new *content* to what was revealed in the Old Testament. For example, the beatitudes in Matthew 5 reflect qualities listed in Isaiah 61: "poor," "brokenhearted," "to comfort all who mourn," "righteousness," "gladness," "shout for joy," "humiliation," "possess . . . the land," "blessed," "rejoice greatly," "righteousness and praise." Or loving one's enemy (Mt 5:44) was already commanded in the Hebrew Scriptures (Ex 23:4; Prov 25:21; cf. Lev 19:34). And Jesus highlighted the "Golden Rule"—treating others as we want to be treated, which is another way of saying "love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 19:18)—as the sum of the Law and the Prophets.

In his incarnation, life, death, resurrection and the blessed hope of his return, Jesus gives a new *meaning* and *motivation* to the moral core of the Old Testament. The believer's orientation is Christ, the new Adam (Rom 5; 1 Cor 15) and *the* image of God (Col 1:15; Heb 1:3); he has come to restore our fallen humanity and to gradually transform us into his image (2 Cor 3:18). This goal will be realized when he finally brings heaven and earth together (the new heavens and new earth).

In his earthly ministry, Jesus announced that God's kingdom or reign had broken into human history, and he sought to show what it means for

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his followers to live under that rule as God's subjects and Jesus' disciples. Living under the lordship of Christ will lead to an enriched and deepened moral life—indeed, a moral transformation—that is sustained by God's grace as we trust and obey our heavenly Father.

Again, Jesus' coming imparts life before God with new *meaning* and *motivation* through his incarnation, life, death and resurrection. Being a new creation in Christ gives new shape to our ethical lives. So, for instance, in the Old Testament, God's people were commanded to love God and others. Yet in the New Testament, the "old command" gives way to the "new command": "Love one another, even *as I have loved you*" (Jn 13:34; cf. 1 Jn 2:7-8). The Christ event has the capacity to so reshape our identity that we will put off the things that pertain to our old life in Adam ("the old self") and put on the virtues that find their orientation in Christ—love, kindness, compassion, humility, gentleness, mercy, patience, perseverance (Rom 13:12-14; Eph 4:17-24; Col 3:8-14).

The "Jesus Creed" of loving God and others is the heart of our moral lives as they are transformed by God's Spirit.

The Direction of the Book

The shape of this book will address the life of love and wisdom to be lived out as Christians—not only as virtuous persons, but as Christians in community and in society and in a world of God's creation as his stewards. Book one of our volume lays out preliminary considerations to set the context of our discussion:

- Love—the heart of biblical ethics
- Law—God's standards for human behavior
- Sin—the violation of those standards
- Virtues and vices—character qualities, positive or negative, developed over time through choices humans make
- Ethical alternatives—leading systems attempting to give a coherent account of ethical knowledge and human duties

In book two, we organize the bulk of our work around the Ten Com-

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mandments and ethical themes springing from them—loving *God* (commandments 1-4) and loving *others* (commandments 6-10). The New Testament writers as well as Jesus himself assumed the ongoing relevance of these commands (Mt 19:17-19; 1 Tim 1:8-10; Jas 2:8-11). However, these commands are now given true shape by Jesus Christ, who is both the *goal* or *fulfillment* of the Mosaic law, as well as its *completion* or *terminus* (Rom 10:4). Believers in Christ now live according to the "law of the Spirit" (Rom 8:2) and "the law of Christ" (Gal 6:2). Why? Because Christ has taken Israel's (and humanity's) curse of the law on himself (Gal 3:13), bringing an end to exile with God. As a result, God's people—no longer a national, ethnic entity—are not "under the law" of Moses (1 Cor 9:20), being subject to its curses and judgments. That said, certain moral features found within the Mosaic law are fundamental to our life as God's people in Christ. The gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit—unlike earlier boundary markers such as circumcision and food laws—is what marks out the renewed humanity in Christ. Those who belong to Christ have the Spirit. They are not defined by a former this-worldly orientation ("in the flesh"), but they participate in a new sphere of life and are given a new identity by the Spirit (Rom 8:9). As they live out their lives in Christ, they bear the Spirit's fruit, against which there can be no true law (Gal 5:22-23).

Beyond the framework of the Ten Commandments, we then discuss three matters that require more detailed attention:

- The Christian and society
- An approach to handling ethical issues on which Christians differ
- Discerning the will of God in nonethical matters

Furthermore, our approach will assume the normativity of Scripture's ethical teachings unless Scripture itself modifies the teaching. Primarily, we have in mind how the Old Testament comes to be fulfilled and reinterpreted through Jesus himself, who takes it up and incorporates certain aspects of it into his own teaching—as do the apostles in their writings (see part two on "Law"). At some points, our approach will suggest what may be less demanding in places than other contemporary evangelical views—at others, more demanding. Historical passages may be used to

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reinforce the teaching of Scripture, but the mere recording of an event without a biblical judgment as to its ethics will not be used to establish standards of behavior. And we take the historical actions of God/Christ in the Scriptures as morally justifiable.[4] We disagree with moral relativism that sees morality as a mere reflection of the accidents of history and culture. On the other hand, we affirm objective moral truths and duties—rooted in the good, loving character of the God who commands. And these duties are universally binding, whether people know them or not, whether people accept them or not. (That is the meaning of "objective.")

Now, some Christian thinkers claim that universally binding moral laws found in Scripture can come into genuine conflict (sometimes called "conflicting absolutists"), but we believe that God's moral laws or demands do not genuinely conflict with one another. Rather, they stand in a *hierarchy* or order of duties. (We explore this in greater detail later in the book.)

Perhaps another important distinction is important here: "absolute" and "objective." Some moral demands are *absolute*—not to rape or torture babies for fun. Here's another absolute duty: "One ought to promote the kingdom of God."[5] On the other hand, some moral demands—"keep your promises" or "do not deceive"—are objective, but not strictly absolute or exceptionless in the face of other moral principles to consider. Ethicists call these *prima facie* duties—that is, *all things being equal,* you keep your promises and don't deceive. In cases of supreme emergency, as when innocent human lives are at stake, deceiving Nazis would be morally permitted (as we later argue). Not all Christians will agree here, and we will do our best to assess the biblical text as it bears on these topics.

We also hold to a "transcendental" ethic rather than one anchored in the empirical world (science, nature) or in the human, whether as an individual or as a species—though we should still be good students of human nature and human behavior. Furthermore, this is no mere impersonal Platonic ethic—a duty to some abstract "forms" of "goodness" or "justice." Rather, it is profoundly personal; ethics is rooted in the tripersonal, perfect being who is both the source of goodness and the true object of creaturely worship and love. We could call this "theological ethics."

Though we will not analyze the various theological systems, the position

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will be indicated when the difference in viewpoint brings conflict in deciding an ethical issue. In our longing for the eschaton, when seeing dimly will give way to knowing as we are known (1 Cor 13:12), we acknowledge that Christians of different persuasions disagree on a variety of ethical issues. This is why we have "three (or four or five) views" books on divorce and remarriage, Christians and politics, the sabbath, war and pacifism, law and gospel, and the like. We recognize the place of *mystery*—that there are "secret things" that belong to the Lord (Deut 29:29). We also acknowledge that God has revealed himself in progressive fashion, first in the Old Testament but now more fully through Christ and the apostles. Even so, we await God's final revelation to clarify these points of conflict and disagreement. In this book, we will seek, as best as we can, to let the Bible set its own agenda, and will avoid imposing a logically deduced system of ethics on the biblical data.

What study could be more important for Christians than fulfilling the purposes of God for their lives—a will that is for our good and our well-being (Deut 6:24; 10:13)? We turn now to the exciting study of guidance on living wisely, faithfully and obediently. While we do touch on the topic of growing in Christlikeness, that is not our primary focus.[6] In order to become like Christ by the power of the Spirit, we must consider carefully what kind of people we should be like in our thinking, behavior and character.

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BOOK ONE

Foundational Considerations

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PART I

LOVE

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1

Defining Love

The Beatles sang, "All you need is love." Properly understood, they were absolutely right! Love sums up our duty to God and to neighbor, and what greater gift could we receive than the very love of God? Love is the defining characteristic of God ("God is love," 1 Jn 4:8), and God is the very foundation for this "love God—love others" biblical ethic. But what *is* love?

The English word *love* presents us with a problem:

"I love hot dogs and milkshakes."

"I love baroque music."

"John loves Mary."

"For God so loved the world."

Despite centuries of the widespread use of Scripture and its emphasis on God's love, our English word *love* is still inadequate.

Whether among the Kpelle of Liberia or the Siriono, hidden away in the jungles of the upper Amazon, translators have wrestled with how to translate the biblical conception of love. Perhaps it is so difficult to express because it has been so little lived and thus never assigned a name. When the translator was seeking to put into the Siriono language, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 Jn 4:11), he uncovered the root of the universal human problem.

"The Siriono will never do that," Echobe, his Christian informant, said.

"No, by yourselves you can't. But God is the one who causes us to love each other."

Echobe answered, "We Siriono say, 'That's just the way we are,' and keep right on fussing, fighting and ignoring God's Word. Even if God helps us,

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it's not probable that we will love each other." No wonder the word is missing in every tongue!

Yet God's entire will for what people should be and do hangs on this command, "You shall love." What, then, does God expect of us?

The Biblical Definition of Love

First, a little history on the word *love.* Ancient Greeks had four different words for love—*philia, eros, storgē* and *agapē.* During the fourth century B.C. the Greeks had come to use *agapē* as their standard word. One reason for this was that another word for love—*philia*—was in some cases taking on the additional meaning of "kiss."

The Bible doesn't give us a tidy or rigid distinction between *philia* and *agapē,* despite the popularization of this notion in much Christian literature: "friendship" (*philia*) versus "commitment" (*agapē*). The Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament (the Septuagint) used the verbs *phileō* and *agapaō* interchangeably to translate the verb *'āhab* ("love").[1] Jacob's lopsided love for Joseph is *agapaō* (Gen 37:3). Although Amnon "loved" (*agapaō*) Tamar, he would rape her (2 Sam 13:1), but when he raped her, he "hated her with a very great hatred" (2 Sam 13:15). Proverbs 8:17 uses both words interchangeably: "I love [*agapaō*] those who love [*phileō*] me."

This overlap is evident in the New Testament as well. Although both John 3:35 and John 5:20 read, "The Father loves the Son," ones uses *phileō* while the other uses *agapaō*. The Father also "loves" (*phileō*) Jesus' disciples (16:27). In John, both "love" verbs are used for the disciple "whom Jesus loved."[2] And Demas abandoned Paul because he "loved" (*agapaō*) the world (2 Tim 4:10). So, there is overlap in these two words, and we should be careful not to press the distinction too strongly, even if *agapē* is used more often than *philia* to depict God's love.

The philosopher Aristotle referred to three categories of "friendship" (*philia*). Two of these are inferior friendships. Not that they are bad or evil, but they are not ideal. They are based on an advantage persons bring to each other. It can be a friendship based on *usefulness* (you may find an intelligent student who can help you study for your physics exam), or it can be based on the *pleasure* a person brings (you may enjoy watching football

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games with someone who is a fan of the same team). But the ideal or *good* friendship is based on equally virtuous persons who engage with each other in virtuous activity; "a friend is another self," Aristotle said.

Aristotle offers some insights that parallel what Jesus has to say about friendship in John 15:12-15. Jesus said that the greatest display of love (*agapē*) is laying down one's life for his friends (*philōn*)—a picture of virtuous equals. Indeed, Christ called his disciples "friends" (*philous*) rather than "slaves" (*doulous*) because he told them what he learned from his Father. Yet there are differences between Jesus and his disciples. In friendship with Christ, there is not a pure reciprocity: "You are My friends if you do what I command you" (Jn 15:14). Of course, we cannot tell Jesus "and you are *my* friend if you do what I tell you"! In fact, on the same evening in the upper room, Jesus told the disciples he was their "teacher" and "Lord" (Jn 13:13-14). But the implication in this teaching is that we are true friends with God through Christ (cf. Jas 2:23; 4:4)—even though we fall far short of God's virtuous perfections. And in Christ's own ministry, he was known as a "friend of . . . sinners" (Mt 11:19). What greater friendship could there be than with the Father or Jesus Christ whom he sent into the world!

By looking at the friendship God has shown us, we come to see biblical love is *a self-giving commitment or devotion—whether to God or fellow humans.* Our love must be properly ordered, however. Greater love is due to God than to our fellow human beings, no matter how closely related or virtuous they are.

Love toward *God* will exhibit single-mindedness ("purity of heart"), obedience and worship. On the human level, love toward others means sacrificing for their well-being without the motivation of personal gain.

There are both internal and external elements in the biblical concept of love. *Love* is a noun that may indicate a particular kind of feeling, but it is also a verb that emphasizes how we should behave and how we should orient our mindset. The internal aspect focuses on emotion, disposition, motive. The external aspect focuses on volition, choices, actions, a way of life.

Internal aspects of love. In the Old Testament, love speaks of a spontaneous feeling that impels self-giving. This was true both for God and

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humans. When a human "loved" God, it meant to have pleasure in God, striving impulsively after him, seeking God for his own sake. From God's side, the warm, strong feeling of affection that characterizes a healthy parent-child relationship is taken as a picture of how God the Father relates to Israel, his son. Love is the foundation of the covenant relationship. If the legal, covenantal aspect of the relationship is strong in the father-son analogy, the passionate loving-kindness of a good marriage is strong in the picture of God the husband and Israel the wife. The climactic revelation of this love relationship is seen in the prophet Hosea and his well-loved harlot-wife. The same analogy of father-son, bridegroom-bride continues in the New Testament, focusing on the warm affection and unfailing bonds between two who love each other deeply.

But the internal aspect of love is more than a feeling. It is a characteristic of life, a disposition. Old Testament scholars seem to have a problem in translating another Hebrew word, *ḥesed.* Some translations speak of *loving-kindness* (KJV), some of *steadfast love* (ASV, RSV, ESV), some of *constant love* (GNT). Indeed, the love of God is steadfast, unfailing, never-changing, faithful to his covenant promises. This is a committed love—not a sometime thing, tentative and sporadic, but from generation to generation, from age to age. This unending love is faithful through all kinds of circumstances, even rejection. Biblical love, then, is not a passing emotion, but a way of life, a disposition, a relationship of permanent commitment to the welfare of another.

There is yet another element in the internal aspect of biblical love: loving feelings motivate actions. In fact, it is not too much to say that love is the only motive. At the root of every choice, every action a person takes, lies love—whether for self, for others, for God, or in combination. But love—even disordered love—shapes behavior.

As we note later in the book, *selfishness* is not the same as *self-interest.* We feed ourselves because of self-interest (an appropriate expression of self-love); out of *selfishness,* some amass wealth, refusing to consider how they may help (an inappropriate expression of self-love). So when we speak of the "glory of God," this is not, strictly speaking, a motive. We are designed to function properly in loving and serving God, who is worthy of our

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worship. But in committing ourselves to the worship-worthy triune God, we also find joy and fulfillment in this relationship as a by-product (Ps 16:11; 63:7). To obey God is *for our good* (Deut 10:13). Love for God is not in conflict with an appropriate sense of self-interest or self-love. We will look at this more closely below.

Our focus on the internal aspects of love is immediately shifted to the external by the term *motive.* Motivated to what? To act. So we now turn from love as an inner response to love as a description of how a love-motivated person behaves.

External aspects of love. We are quite familiar with the image of "falling" in love—and, somehow, falling out of love. Love is understood as feeling. Yet the Bible emphasizes what love does more than how love feels: "God so loved the world that he gave" (Jn 3:16 NIV); the Son of God "loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20 NIV). Biblical love refers to a free and decisive act determined by the subject himself—not by the drawing power of the object, as with passionate *eros,* familial love or the warm mutuality of friendship. The primary characteristic of biblical love is commitment to act for the well-being of another.

In contemporary Western culture, "I don't feel like doing that" often implies "I'm not obligated to do that." By contrast, in the New Testament, as in the Old, loving is often linked with obeying—the outward response of an inward condition of love. We are *commanded* to love. "You shall love the LORD your God. . . . You shall love your neighbor as yourself " (Mt 22:37-39; cf. Lev 19:18; Deut 6:5). "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (Jn 14:15 ESV). "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments" (1 Jn 5:3 ESV; cf. 2 Jn 6). The first question Scripture asks is not, how do you feel about this person? but rather, what choices must you make concerning this person? Christ commands us to love, pray for and do good to our enemy—despite our negative feelings (Mt 5:44; Lk 6:27).

Of course, feelings are only *one facet* of who we are. That is why we train children to apologize when they have hurt another person—to make peace even though they don't *feel* like doing so. This is part of training them in setting aside feelings to pursue reconciliation and forgiveness. A human

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being is a multifaceted whole who cannot be divided up into intellect, will and emotions. However, since a whole person does function both volitionally and emotionally, it is proper for us to say that the will "controlled" one action and the emotions "controlled" another. Yet one can will to act contrary to the impulse of one's emotions. Jesus did this when his emotions cried out, "Father . . . let this cup pass from Me" (Mt 26:39). Yet he chose the Father's will, contrary to what he wanted, or how he felt. From the Bible's viewpoint, the choice to act lovingly, not the intensity of the feeling, is the test and ultimate proof of love. The concept of volitional love overriding affectional love is of paramount importance, for we may not be able to control our emotional response. But by the grace of God we can choose to act lovingly, no matter how we feel.

So those who claim that this emphasis on will over emotions is dishonest and not being "true" to oneself are mistaken. To assume it is deceptive if one does not act in conformity with one's feelings is to reduce personhood to emotion. Yes, each of us is a person with feelings, but also with the capacity to choose, to honor commitments, to use one's reason, to consider one's primary obligations to God. To be honest to myself means I must be honest to my *whole* self *before God*—to act in conformity with his will and my commitment to him. To truly know ourselves as humans, John Calvin rightly affirmed, we must first truly know God's character and his priorities for us. This is indeed a liberating truth—I can choose to act for the welfare of another no matter how I feel about him or about the action God desires of me.

Too many misguided parents misunderstand this point. Honesty does not demand that a son tell his father in anger, "I hate you"—or express some other unworthy feeling. Love, the virtue of self-control and wisdom will not permit it. For every disciple, loving obedience to God will have concern for relationships and for the feelings of others; the believer should look to God's grace to deal with a hateful spirit and to choose to act in consistently loving ways. The loving act does not cancel the pain of previous hurts or the guilt of hostile feelings, but it is a start in the right direction.

To say that acting lovingly takes precedence over the emotion of love does not mean that biblical love is exhausted by acting lovingly. Without

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the emotion, love can be authentic, but it is not complete. If we act in love, ordinarily the affection will follow. Thus one can love in a biblical, active sense, without liking. In fact, it is required that we act lovingly no matter how we feel. The vivid Cantonese expression for this is "swallowing a dead cat"!

Love-in-action has both a negative and a positive aspect. The so-called Silver Rule speaks of refraining from harming—that is, do no harm, or "Do not do to others what you do not want others to do to you." The great Chinese master Confucius and the great Jewish master Hillel taught this. It is true, of course—that is how love behaves. But this is only a faint shadow of the Golden Rule, that we should do to others as we would have them do to us (Mt 7:12)—a rephrasing of "love your neighbor as yourself." Biblical love is positive and active—constantly planning and acting for the welfare of others. To refrain from killing one's enemy is a loving thing, but to sacrifice and show kindness for an enemy is true, Godlike love (Mt 5:44-45).

In fact, the Silver Rule can easily become the very opposite of biblical love. This is highlighted in a culture where the Silver Rule has been dominant. A Japanese philosopher, Kitamori, tells us that the Silver Rule lies at the base of a strong Japanese characteristic: disentanglement. To refrain from harming another is best achieved by staying clear of him. So the Japanese characteristic is to assume incredible obligations for those to whom one is inevitably related (family, work) but to remain adamantly aloof, disentangled from all other responsibility. But love deliberately entangles itself—the very thing God has done! As N. T. Wright often says, God has stepped into our world, getting his feet dirty and hands bloody. Biblical love becomes inextricably involved—and at great cost.

An emerging definition of love, then, is an affection, or a desire for the welfare of another that moves to a commitment to act for her well-being. Ordinarily, this is the way love moves, from attitude to action. Jesus was moved with loving compassion when he saw the distressed multitudes, prompting him to call his disciples to pray for laborers to reach them (Mt 9:36-38). But when the internal aspects are missing, one can begin with loving action, the external, and leave the feeling to tag along as it will. For example, we can begin to pray for our enemies and do practical good for them (Mt 5:44; Lk 6:27). And this is not an aberration, an undesirable last

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resort. No, *acting lovingly without the feeling of love can be of the very essence of biblical love*—that which causes it to stand out in bold contrast to ordinary human love. We call it sacrificial love. Thus love may flow either direction—joyfully from affection to action or painfully across the bridge of the cross—"nevertheless," no matter how I long for some other way, "not my will, but yours be done" (Lk 22:42 ESV).

If the internal aspects (love as affection and as motive) lead to a disposition that is characterized by a consistently loving attitude, the external aspects (love as choice and action) will lead to a loving way of life. But this way of life, by definition, cannot be expressed in isolation. Love demands a second party. We have concentrated thus far on the one loving, rather than on the one loved. How do the two relate? Ideally, of course, love is mutual. Affection is met with affection; loving acts are reciprocated.

Reciprocal Love and Nonreciprocal Love

Some disparage reciprocal love, calling it "need-love" or even "swap-love." They say it is unworthy to expect or even to desire a return on one's investment of love in another. But it is easy to become more "spiritual" than the Bible. C. S. Lewis speaks to this:

> We must be cautious about calling Need-love "mere selfishness." *Mere* is always a dangerous word. No doubt Need-love, like all our impulses, can be selfishly indulged. A tyrannous and gluttonous demand for affection can be a horrible thing. But in ordinary life no one calls a child selfish because it turns for comfort to its mother. Every Christian would agree that a man's spiritual health is exactly proportional to his love for God. But man's love for God, from the very nature of the case, must always be very largely, and most often be entirely, a Need-love. This is obvious when we implore forgiveness for our sins or support in our tribulations. . . . It would be a bold and silly creature that came before its Creator with the boast, "I'm no beggar. I love you disinterestedly."[3]

Indeed, God himself expects a "return on his investment." He longs and desires to be loved, as we see clearly in the book of Hosea (cf. also Mt 22:37; Jn 4:23; Rev 3:20). But the difference is this: He does not make a loving response the condition for giving love (Rom 5:6-8), and God's love is char-

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acterized by "enemy love" (Mt 5:43-48). Of course, this runs against our human grain. C. S. Lewis captured this in his poem "As the Ruin Falls." Speaking from the vantage point of human fallenness, Lewis affirms that often lofty talk of love is more like a scholar's parrot that can "talk Greek." Lewis confesses he's never had a selfless thought in his life, that he is "mercenary and self-seeking through and through" and "cannot crawl one inch outside my proper skin."[4] *This self-centeredness is what Christ came to transform, which Lewis himself had also come to experience.*

Sheer uncommitted eros to the ancient Greek, and to the modern person as well, is passionate love that desires the other purely for self. As fallen humans, our inclination is to continue to give only so long as we receive—or so long as we hope to receive. But God's kind of love is not preoccupied with the question, what can I get? but, what can I give? It is not, how well am I loved? but rather, how well do I love?

Thus the focus of biblical love is on the quality of the subject, the loving character of the one loving—not on the quality of the object or its worthiness of love. Jesus spells this out in great detail with many examples (Lk 6:27-35). He teaches that to love those who love us is nothing great. It is when we choose deliberately to love those who do not deserve it that we have reflected divine love—a love that sends rain and sunshine on the unrighteous and evil, not just the good. This is what it means to be "merciful" (Lk 6:36) or "perfect" just as the Father is (Mt 5:48); when we love our enemies, we resemble God in his perfect love.

Yet the ideal is reciprocal love, each finding in the other abundant reason to appreciate, to feel drawn to, to be overwhelmed by the desire to give. We give because we want to, not because we have to—we delight in the loved one. Then we rejoice in receiving from the one loved. When the object is not lovable, or the emotion is not present, it is then that the character of the giving lover shines in greatest splendor. Biblical love, then, is an affectionate disposition that motivates the lover to consistently act for the welfare of another, whether or not the other deserves it or reciprocates.

We have tried to sketch out the biblical meaning of love. But the length and breadth and depth and height of it (Eph 3:18-19) stretch far beyond our reach. What shall we do? Often, to understand an abstract idea or a large

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concept it is necessary to define by description or demonstration. How good that God has given us both.

Love Defined by Description

The most well-known description of love was penned by Paul (1 Cor 13). Notice that he gives examples of the internal but also the external: love's attitude and disposition, but also love's activity. On the one hand love does not boast, is not proud or self-seeking, keeps no record of wrongs, does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth, always trusts and hopes. On the other hand, love takes action: it is patient and kind, is not rude and quick-tempered, always protects, and always perseveres.

Scripture is filled with many other descriptions of love. Love is without hypocrisy (Rom 12:9; 2 Cor 6:6; 1 Pet 1:22), works no ill for others (Rom 13:10), will lay down its life for another (Jn 15:13), takes the servant's role (Gal 5:13), is brotherly (Rom 12:16; 1 Thess 4:9; Heb 13:1).

Though direct descriptions of love are plentiful enough to challenge for a lifetime, the indirect descriptions seem all but exhaustless. Consider the teachings on what have been called the "reciprocal verbs" of the New Testament. Not only are we told to love one another thirteen times (Jn 13:34-35; 15:12, 17; Rom 13:8; Gal 5:13; 1 Thess 3:12; 4:9; 1 Pet 1:22; 1 Jn 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11-12; 2 Jn 5), we are commanded to have the same care one for another (1 Cor 12:25), to receive one another (Rom 15:7), to be affectionate to one another (Rom 12:10), to greet one another with a holy kiss (Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Pet 5:14), to wait for one another (1 Cor 11:33), to be kind one to another (Eph 4:32), to prefer one another (Rom 12:10), to forbear one another in love (Eph 4:2; Col 3:13), to forgive one another (Eph 4:32; Col 3:13). Furthermore, we are not to judge one another (Rom 14:13), speak evil of one another (Jas 4:11), lie to one another (Col 3:9), "bite" one another (Gal 5:15), provoke one another (Gal 5:26) or complain against one another (Jas 5:9).

But this is only part of it. Love requires that we submit to one another (Eph 5:21; 1 Pet 5:5); everyone is actually a member one of another (Rom 12:5; Eph 4:25); we are to live in harmony one with another (Rom 12:16; 15:5); we are to edify one another (1 Thess 5:11), exhort one another (Heb

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3:13; 1 Thess 5:11), admonish one another (Rom 15:14; Col 3:16), sing to one another (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16), encourage one another (1 Thess 4:18; 5:11), confess sins to one another (Jas 5:16), serve one another (Gal 5:13; 1 Pet 4:10), wash one another's feet (Jn 13:14), show hospitality toward one another (1 Pet 4:9), stimulate one another to love and good works (Heb 10:24), pray for one another (Jas 5:16) and bear one another's burdens (Gal 6:2). Incredible as this list may be, it is only one of any number of teachings in Scripture that describe the attitudes and behavior of love.

Perhaps the most extensive descriptions of love are embedded within the commands of Scripture. Our next section addresses the topic of law and love, but at this point, let us agree that the commands of Scripture reveal God's will for those to whom they are addressed and that his ultimate will is that we be like him in moral character (Gal 4:19). Since "God is love" it should come as no surprise that the entire Old Testament revelation of God's will for humanity hangs on the law of love (Mt 22:37-40). After stating the Golden Rule, Jesus concluded, "For this is [the essence of] the Law and the Prophets" (Mt 7:12). Paul repeats the thought: "For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Gal 5:14 ESV). Again he says that this law of love sums up the Ten Commandments (Rom 13:8-9). In short, the commands of Scripture indicate how love will behave.

Yet Scripture goes beyond description to actually exemplifying and demonstrating love—what we see in the incarnation, life and atoning death of Jesus of Nazareth.

Love Demonstrated

"God is love," says John (1 Jn 4:8, 16). This is the basic difference between the biblical concept of love and our concept of love. The Bible defines love by the nature of God. We tend to define love by the nature of humanity.

To say that God is love does not mean that God *equals* love. Love does not describe God exhaustively. He has other qualities, such as wisdom and justice; but this does not mean that those characteristics in God's nature violate love. God always acts lovingly, even in judgment.

Again, "God is love" does not mean that *love equals God.* Love is not an

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abstract entity, having existence as an object, let alone having warmth and personality. To say that love and God are equivalent would deify love and make it some absolute concept. Perhaps one might claim that God himself is subject to and judged by this standard outside himself. But just as God's attribute as Creator only makes sense if he has created, so love cannot exist in the abstract but in relationship. Indeed, the triune God is the foundation and source of love. So it is inaccurate to say that God is "a person." Rather, God is a personal being—three mutually loving and engaging persons in one being. Father, Son and Spirit are God-in-relation.

As a physical analogy, we can think of creatures in nature—two-headed snakes and turtles or even inseparable conjoined twins—that have more than one distinct center of awareness or consciousness within one being. Or consider the three-headed dog Cerberus of Greek mythology. We could speak of the Trinity—a spiritual or soulish being—as three personal centers of awareness and will as inseparably united, God in loving community. No wonder love comes from God (1 Jn 4:7, 19)! And since love is rooted in God himself, true human love is Godlikeness (1 Jn 4:16).

God was not obliged to love by some external "ought." Loving is the way he is. This is one of the greatest evidences for the Trinity. God the Father loves God the Son and God the Holy Spirit from all eternity. Within the Trinity, love is other-directed. God the Son loves the Father and the Spirit, and the Spirit loves the Son and the Father. Yet Christ's "cry of dereliction" from the cross—"My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt 27:46 NIV)—reveals the other-directed love of God in *another* direction, toward fallen human beings. Jesus, the Israelite who faithfully lived out Israel's story, bore the curse promised to a disobedient Israel (Deut 27)—indeed for a rebellious humanity. By hanging on a tree, he bore our judgment, our exile, our alienation, our curse (Deut 21:23; Gal 3:13), while experiencing a profound sense of abandonment by the Father.

Thus, the loving nature of God is the basis for his creative and redeeming activity. He created humanity because he is love and desired a being designed on his own pattern so that he could love that creature and be freely loved in return. When humanity rejected this loving approach of God, breaking that relationship, God continued loving because God is love by

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nature. And so we have the story of redemption. Love became incarnate. Thus all of life finds meaning in being loved by God and loving him.

By his life, Jesus demonstrated flawlessly how Godlike love behaves, and in his death he demonstrated the ultimate proof of love. He was our model—we can now *see* how we are to "walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph 5:1-2 NIV). We now can *see* what it means to have "the same mindset as Christ,"

> Who, being in very nature God,
> did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
> rather, he made himself nothing
> by taking the very nature of a servant,
> being made in human likeness.
> And being found in appearance as a man,
> he humbled himself
> by becoming obedient to death—
> even death on a cross! (Phil 2:6-8 NIV)

"By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 Jn 3:16 NKJV). Throughout the New Testament Christ's love is given as our model: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 15:12 ESV).

All of Christ's life puts on display God's loving character (cf. Jn 14:9), but the cross of Christ demonstrates the love of God more clearly than any other act of any other person in all history.

Christ himself is the perfect, living model of God's character; but God graciously re-creates that character in other people who in turn demonstrate true love. In fact, "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35).

Here is a modern demonstration of Christ-like love:

> Pastor Son was . . . a mild, little man—less than five feet tall—whose two great joys in life were his two sons, Tong-In and Tong-Sin. During the war Tong-In, like his father, had refused to worship at the Shinto shrines and had been thrown out of school by the Japanese. After the war, at twenty-four

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> years of age, he went back to high school. . . . In October 1948, a wild Communist uprising swept through his part of South Korea and Communist youths seized the school in a reign of terror. A nineteen-year-old Communist leveled a pistol at Tong-In and ordered him to renounce his Christian faith. But Tong-In only pleaded with him to turn Christian himself and try the Christian way of love. Tong-Sin, the younger brother, rushed up to save him. "Shoot me," he shouted, "and let my brother live." "No," cried Tong-In, "I am the elder. I am the one who should die. Shoot me." The Communist shot them both. . . . Two days later the uprising was smashed and the murderer of the two boys was caught and brought to trial. Pastor Son found him with his hands tied behind his back, about to be condemned to death. He went to the military commander. "No amount of punishment will bring back my two sons," he said, "so what is to be gained by this? Let me, instead, take the boy and make a Christian of him so that he can do the work in the world that Tong-In and Tong-Sin left undone." Stunned at first by the proposal, the authorities reluctantly consented to release the young man into the custody of the father of the boys he had killed, and Pastor Son took him home.[5]

Not only does God reveal the nature of love in the pages of Scripture, but he graciously demonstrates his loving character in his eternal Son partaking in flesh and blood to identify with us and die for us. And the children of God across the ages in every land serve as a further demonstration of Christlike love—an inspiration to the rest of us to do likewise.

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2

The Objects and Conflicts of Love

The Objects of Biblical Love

The vast array of potential loves can be divided into four groups: love for God, love for others, love for self and love for things. It is quite possible to love many people and even many things at once without any sense of competition or conflict. But often there is conflict among the loves, and nothing can be more painful and destructive. First let us identify the objects of love and then turn to the biblical way for resolving the conflict.

Love for God. Christ tells us that this is the supreme objective: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart" (Mt 22:37 NIV). This is the first command, first in importance, and the greatest, superseding all others as the controlling authority of life. Thus the Old Testament command (Deut 6:5) identified by the teachers of Israel as the ultimate, comprehensive summary of God's will for humanity was affirmed by Jesus the Messiah as the most important commandment of all.

How does a mere human being love the infinite God? By the loving adoration of worship, by unceasing thanksgiving, by a life of steadfast obedience, by sharing his companionship and exulting in the endless profusion of his gifts. To love God is the goal of creation and redemption and the very acknowledgment of ultimate reality.

Indeed, to love God is the first and great commandment, there is another commandment—one on which "the Law and Prophets" depend (Mt 7:12)—to love others. And one cannot obey the first without obeying the second (Mt 22:34-40; 1 Jn 3:11-18; 4:19–5:1).

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Love for others. Jesus identified two commandments on which all else depends, and the second, he says, is very like the first: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mt 22:39 NIV; cf. Lev 19:18). Love for God is the supreme command, but the demands of other-love are not equal for all people. Consider the various levels of responsibility or commitment.

When God created the male, he judged that it "is not good that the man should be alone" (Gen 2:18)—even though he had daily companionship with God. And God created a partner to complement him. The primary horizontal relationship on earth is the husband-wife union. As Christ loved the church and gave himself for it, so a husband is to love his wife (Eph 5:25); wives, in turn, are to love their husbands (Tit 2:4).

Then comes love for one's own family: parents, children, brothers, sisters. So important is this relationship that one who does not care for his own family is worse than an unbeliever (1 Tim 5:4, 8).

But there is a family beyond one's human family. The Old Testament emphasized responsibility toward one's fellow Israelite—and in the new covenant community, believers have an extended spiritual family in Christ (Mk 10:29-30; Lk 8:19-21). Believers are commanded to love each other as evidence of genuine faith (1 Jn 3–5). *Showing love to brothers and sisters in Christ is one of John's three "tests" to assess or "know" where one stands in one's faith (1 Jn 3:14)—the others being doctrinal orthodoxy about Christ's incarnation (1 Jn 4:2) and obedience to God's commands (1 Jn 3:24; 5:2).*[1] Paul concurs: "Let us do good to all men"—yes—"and especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Gal 6:10 RSV). This is the New Testament pattern (Jn 15:12, 17; 1 Pet 1:22; 2:17; 3:8). It draws the altogether startling picture of a group of people, the church, that is, a true family bound together by closer blood ties than human blood relations—the blood (i.e., death) of Christ. It is the picture of a people bound by love in interdependent responsibility for one another in every facet of life: spiritual, physical, emotional, material. It is reminiscent of the theme in Charles Dickens's *Nicholas Nickleby*: "They came to see that family need not be defined merely as those with whom we share blood, but as those for whom we would give our blood."[2] But biblical love does not end there.

The Old Testament theme of "neighbor love" was never restricted in

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Scripture to fellow Israelites. The foreigner was included (Lev 19:33). But Jewish people, being human, wanted to restrict the application of the sweeping demands of love. No wonder one lawyer who wanted to justify his unloving behavior asked Jesus: "And who is my neighbor?" (Lk 10:29). Jesus turned his question upside down (or right side up) with the story of the half-breed, despised Samaritan, who became a neighbor to the one who needed him. *Neighbor* does not really mean "anyone" or "everyone." It is so easy to love "humanity" but ignore or even despise the one nearby.

Love is not mere tolerance, a warm feeling for everyone "out there" or even special indignation for the oppressed in some distant place. It must be for one's neighbor—the person within reach. But love as action must be for someone who needs what I have and can give (Gal 6:10). Neighbor-love extends to a wider circle than love of a fellowship, just as love of a fellowship extends beyond family love. And it is not restricted to worthy neighbors. It includes even one's enemy.

Love for one's enemy was taught in the Jewish law (Ex 23:5; Job 31:29-30; Prov 24:17; 25:21), but no one took it very seriously. In fact, Jesus says that tradition held it was all right to hate your enemy (Mt 5:43). But he taught love of enemy with a force and consistency that startled the Jewish world. He startled the mindset of the Greco-Roman world as well. This was unique: Love your enemies. If you cannot *feel* all that warm about them, you can *choose* to act lovingly: pray for them, do good to them, speak well of them (Mt 5:43-48; Lk 6:27-38). But the world-shattering message was not that he *taught* this way of life—incredible as that is—but that he loved his own enemies just that way: "But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8 RSV). And we are to love our enemies just that way.

Loving God and loving others—this sums up the whole duty of humans. But some contend that there is a third command—to love self. But the sentence structure will not bear such an all-too-common interpretation. Love for self is *assumed*, not commanded, in both Matthew 22:39 and Ephesians 5:28-29. Let us consider love for self more closely.

Love for self. Paul Vitz, professor emeritus of psychology at New York University, has documented in a convincing manner that contemporary

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psychology, in seeking to make people whole, is committed to the "cult of self-worship." Apparently in accommodation to this pervasive therapeutic atmosphere, there is a tidal wave of Christian promotion of self-love as the biblical norm, so that self-discovery, self-affirmation, self-assertion, self-fulfillment, self-actualization, self-worth, self-esteem and self-importance are all advocated as worthy objectives for the Christian. In fact, we are told, we cannot be whole without them. How does this fit with the Bible's injunctions to self-sacrifice, self-crucifixion—indeed, with the command to hate oneself (Lk 14:26)? Part of the problem is in the definition of "self-love," and part is a basic ideological difference.

The term *self-love* can be used to mean either "self-centeredness" or "self-interest." If we have in mind self-centeredness, no Christian would advocate it (cf. 2 Tim 3:2: "lovers of self"); if we have in mind self-interest, we can affirm it up to a point. John Stott affirms that self-love is a *fact* to be acknowledged, not a *goal* to be pursued.[3] We have noted that we have a natural, indeed, God-given self-interest: we care for, feed and clothe our bodies; we protect ourselves from danger. No, we are *not* commanded to love ourselves—we are *designed* that way. So how we want to be loved becomes a measure by which we should love others. Do I seek my neighbor's good as I seek my own? Or does self-interest diminish my seeking first the kingdom of God?

But doesn't Christ say that people should *hate* themselves (Lk 14:26)? When we look at the terms *love* and *hate* in the Old Testament, the idea of emotion is often not intended. God did not feel animosity toward Esau and so choose Jacob over him (Is 9:10-13). No, God chose the nation of Israel (Jacob) over Edom (Esau); God would fulfill his promise through Israel, not any other nation. That God was choosing a particular nation for his historical purposes is clear in Malachi: "How have you loved *us* [i.e., the nation of Israel]?" (Mal 1:2); "[the nation of] Edom says, '*We* have been beaten down'" (Mal 1:4). Even in Genesis, the Lord told Rebekah that two "nations" were in her womb (Gen 25:23). The same could be said about God's choosing ("loving") the less respectable Judah, from whose tribe Messiah would come, over the virtuous Joseph. To "hate" in this sense is to reject; to "love" is to accept, affirm. When the time comes that love for

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parents and love for God come into conflict, we must decide one way or the other. In the same way, we are called on to deny self or to deliberately choose to reject our own selfish interests in favor of God's interests or even those of another person. Those who "love" their own life (their own self) are the ones who affirm their own rights and self-interest at all costs. By doing so, they reject God's claims. Also, in the final analysis, they lose their own life—the very thing for which they were grasping.

But doesn't Scripture refer to God—and even the psalmist—"hating" sinners (Ps 5:5; 11:5; 139:21-22)? Yet God *loves* "the world" (Jn 3:16), doesn't he? Isn't Christ's sacrificial death for the sins of the "whole world"—the same "whole world" that lies in the hands of the evil one (1 Jn 2:2; 5:19)? Simultaneous with this love is a sense in which God hates—that is, his *wrath* is directed against those who oppose him (Jn 3:36); in the same chapter, God's shows *love* to those who oppose him through the gift of Jesus' atoning death for the world that opposes him (Jn 3:16). While Jesus' own brothers were part of the wicked "world" that is hostile to God, they were opposed to Jesus' own kingdom purposes—and under God's wrath ("hate"). Jesus told them: "The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it, that its deeds are evil" (Jn 7:7). During Jesus' earthly ministry, his own brothers didn't believe in him (Jn 7:3), though they would become disciples after his resurrection (Acts 1:14; 1 Cor 15:7) and no longer part of the world.

In terms of self-love today, the contemporary notion is that wholeness begins with self-affirmation and ends with self-fulfillment, whereas Scripture teaches that wholeness begins with self-denial out of love for God and ends with God's (and our) fulfillment. If we *begin* with self-affirmation and make self-fulfillment the primary goal of life, it will elude us. We will not find ultimate fulfillment in life—nor will God's good purposes be fulfilled in us. But if we make the fulfillment of God's purposes in this world our goal ("hunger and thirst for righteousness," Mt 5:6), God will be satisfied and glorified, and we will find, as a byproduct, the fulfillment of the purpose for which God created and redeemed us (we will be "satisfied"). That is true self-fulfillment.

If people *actually* hate themselves emotionally, dislike themselves, they

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are abnormal. And nonacceptance of self is indeed a great problem. Many psychologists seek to solve this problem by convincing people that they are truly worthy or that they are not guilty. Their failure is the fault of their environment or their inherited characteristics, for which they have no responsibility. Self-worth psychology has come to dominate much evangelical counseling theory and practice, as psychologist Jay Adams has documented.[4] The self-worth approach identifies a nonbiblical source of the human problem, external to the person's own moral choices. According to this view, others have imposed a low view of self on such people and thus diminished their potential, and possibly crippled them. Since the root problem is inaccurately identified, a false solution also is provided. Building a high view of oneself is not endorsed by Scripture; indeed, such a "solution" only compounds the problem. Sooner or later hurting people will discover that they really are not all that important in the eyes of others and that they truly are guilty.

The biblical solution to this problem is very different. It is the assurance that God forgives and accepts us in Christ. We are responsible for what we do and what we have become; we really are guilty and unworthy. But the guilt has been done away with. And if God accepts us, we can certainly accept God's judgment of us as the true and reliable one. We human creatures seek security and significance, but all too often from various God substitutes. But in God we find ultimate security through a relationship with God and ultimate significance through a God-given purpose. We *don't* need to love ourselves more. Scripture teaches that we are created in the image of God and that we were created and saved *on purpose.* Though we may not be important or significant to anyone else, we matter to God. If only our self-image could be shaped by the fact that we are created in God's likeness, redeemed at infinite cost, and endowed with a unique purpose in life by God himself!

This great self-discovery of who I am in Christ then frees me and makes me strong to hate and exterminate the evil in myself and to sacrifice (self-denial) my own rights and even my own welfare for others. Now I can gratefully accept what I am—and what I am becoming—as God's loving gifts.

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From this comes a biblical concept of self-image. A "strong" self-image is that perception of self which is true, which is most nearly aligned with the facts, including all the weakness and corruption that is mine through the fall and all the glory that is mine by grace.

Self-love, then, properly defined, is recognized by Scripture as the way God made us. To treat self in this way is to be in alignment with reality and thus to promote wholeness. As believers in a fallen world, we live as in-betweeners, having *already* experienced some of the blessings of the age to come—redemption, forgiveness, adoption, the gift of the Spirit. But we are keenly aware that we have *not yet* received resurrection bodies—a transformed physicality to dwell in a renewed creation in which there is no sickness, pain or death. In this already/not-yet world, we deal with inner brokenness as well. God's desire is not that we live pain-free, tension-free lives, but that we become increasingly conformed to the image of Christ (2 Cor 3:18). Pain often serves as a wake-up call or reminder of our human brokenness and alienation from God so that we might seek "outside assistance" and turn to God in repentance and faith (Lk 13:1-5). Indeed, to be shielded from these reminders of our sin and brokenness would make God into a deceiver, propping us up with the false impression that we do not really need God. In the words of theologian Vernon Grounds,

> An individual, quite completely free from tension, anxiety, and conflict may be only a well-adjusted sinner who is dangerously maladjusted to God; and it is infinitely better to be a neurotic saint than a healthy-minded sinner. . . . Healthy-mindedness may be a spiritual hazard that keeps an individual from turning to God precisely because he has no acute sense of God. . . . Tension, conflict, and anxiety, even to the point of mental illness, may be a cross voluntarily carried in God's service.[5]

John Stott gives sound biblical guidance about self-denial and self-affirmation. First, we should *deny* our *fallen self*—our laziness, self-sufficiency, lack of self-control. Yet we should *affirm* our *created* self—including our human dignity, relationality, creativity, natural gifts from a gracious God; while we are *unworthy* of God's grace, he did not create us *worthless.* Beyond this, as redeemed people of God, we are to *affirm* the *re-created self*—that we are forgiven, adopted into God's family, part of a

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new community in Christ, endowed with spiritual gifts. Finally, as believers, we are called to *deny certain good things as God commands us*—some good things like money, a job, a sport, or a hobby, which may stand in the way of our service to God and his kingdom. By appropriate self-denial (losing our lives for Christ's sake), we will truly find our own true self in Christ (Lk 9:24; Jn 12:25).[6]

Are there other loves? Yes, the Bible appears to make room—just a little—for one other reality: love for things.

Love for things. It is possible to have an appreciation for some object so intense as to be called "love." This can be either demonic, as in covetousness, or it can be legitimate, as in the admiration of something beautiful. Such love can be seen most clearly in the love for a great idea or a cause. The Bible does not speak directly to the question of love for inanimate objects or ideals, other than to condemn such affection when it becomes idolatrous. But Scripture does speak of kindness for animals (Ex 23:12; Deut 5:14; 22:4; 25:4; Prov 12:10), and certainly human experience is replete with examples of love for some animal friend.

God, others, self, things: One may love all so long as they do not conflict. But what if love for someone else conflicts with the love due God? What if my best interests and those of my neighbor's cannot coexist? How do we handle the conflict of loves?

Conflict of Loves

Paul commented that people generally seek their own interests rather than Christ's—and he highlighted Timothy as a notable exception (Phil 2:19-21). Even in the most altruistic of humanistic ethics, concern for God is ignored with humans getting top priority. Biblical love focuses on the centrality of God, the pivotal relationship. But how can I tell if I love God supremely?

It is futile to try to decide whether we have as warm an affection for God as we do for a parent or child, a wife or husband, but there is a way to tell which love is paramount. The controlling love becomes quite evident when a confrontation comes. When the best interest of another or ourselves and the best interest of God come into conflict, love must make a choice.

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Ordinary human love gives for another to a point. But when the cost of acting lovingly gets too high, loving behavior ends. God's kind of love is different. How can I tell whether I truly love my neighbor as Christ would have me love? Ask the key question: Does my love for self limit the expression of my love for the other person, or does my love for the other limit the expression of my love for myself? Love is measured, not by the intensity of its feeling, but by the sacrifice it stands ready to make. Or in our relationship with God, when we are faced with the choice to cater to bodily desires or to discipline ourselves for the purpose of godliness, which gets the priority?

Jesus indicated this when he said, "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn 15:13 RSV). Often love is present without sacrifice, but so long as there is a return benefit, there is no *evidence* that the love is truly other-love rather than self-love. No matter what our emotional response, if we choose to sacrifice what we perceive to be our own interests for the welfare of another, we have loved as God loved. Sacrifice is God's way of loving, though the world finds it beyond comprehension.

Fallen humans do not ordinarily want to get involved for someone else's benefit. Above all, they do not want to suffer loss for someone else. But this is not always the case. Sergeant Dennis Weichel was a twenty-nine-year-old Rhode Island soldier serving in Laghman Province of eastern Afghanistan. In March 2012, a military convoy was approaching a group of Afghani children who were picking up shell casings on the road. They were moved out of the way so that the convoy could pass unobstructed. However, a little Afghan girl ran back out into the road to pick up more casings. Weichel saw the danger and sprang into action. He pushed the girl to safety, but he himself was crushed by a sixteen-ton armored truck. This is a picture of Godlike love: it chooses to get involved, even when it costs.

And yet the sacrifices we shrink from are not usually life-threatening: the sacrifice of a parent to allow the child to be childish when she is young and to let her grow free when she is older, the sacrifice of a child to allow his parent to "smother 'im with motherin'," the sacrifice by a spouse of his right to be right—all the small irritations of the daily routine. For the con-

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flict of interests to be resolved, who will make the sacrifice? Will I take up my cross or nail others to theirs? It depends on whom I love more.

Love takes risks and makes great sacrifices, but it does not "enable." That is, love does not ignore destructive activity and its consequences, but, when possible, holds people accountable for their actions. A young adult who still lives at home with his parents but treats them disrespectfully, is a negative influence on younger siblings, disrupts family harmony and refuses to engage in basic chores must be shown the door. That is the loving thing to do for all concerned. Too often a woman may mistakenly tolerate all manner of abuse in the name of being a "submissive wife"; rather she should remove herself from emotional and physical harm. As Jesus reminded his disciples, there comes a time to shake the dust from our feet rather than subject ourselves to unnecessary hostile treatment and rejection (Mk 6:11).

In love, then, there is a biblical hierarchy in which the lower must always yield to the higher when they come in conflict. We rightly love God, the others in our lives and ourselves. But if the response of love would be unloving to the higher relationship, the lower must yield to the higher. Love for God trumps love for the other and especially love for self. That's how the conflict of loves must be resolved.

Love and Forgiveness

"That a man should always be ready to forgive has been called Jesus' most striking innovation in morality."[7] Perhaps one of the most painful sacrifices that love makes is forgiveness. To forgive is costly, for someone must pay the price of wrong. If I choose to treat the person as if the wrong had never been done (forgive), then I may have to pay for it. It is not just the sacrifice of ego—that seems to be painful enough. But in some way I absorb the cost if I truly forgive. And I do not make the guilty party pay for it in installments through petty insinuations.

When President Ford forgave Richard Nixon, he paid for it, they tell us, in the next election. In Jesus' parable in Matthew 18, a king forgives his servant his debt of ten thousand talents (the equivalent of 160,000 years of daily wages!).[8] This magnanimous act is a costly sacrifice. Even when the

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relationship is such that discipline is necessary, as with a parent and child, forgiveness means full restoration without the haunting specter of subtle reminders. Even where trust needs to be rebuilt, forgiveness can still be shown—as opposed to constantly reminding the child of his disobedience or rebellion.

On the other hand, some people have the knack for making an accusation under the guise of apologetic words: "I'm sorry. I didn't realize you were so sensitive." The net result of such an "apology" is a double wound, one for your badness and a second for my own implied innocence. An honest response might have been, "I wonder if you know how you sound?" Or, better, "Here we are miscommunicating. What should we do next?" The best response, of course, may well be silence and a cheerful moving ahead with the next topic or the business at hand. We don't have to be vindicated in every disagreement, even if we are convinced we are in the right. Many times we should *just let go* rather than insisting on winning. Yes, wisdom is required in judging whether to hold our ground as a matter of principle or to let the matter go and preserve the relationship (Lk 12:13-14; cf. Prov 10:12). The painful way of the cross calls us to true forgiveness—accepting the expense incurred by another's sin.

Must I forgive if the other person does not repent and ask forgiveness? Jesus said, "If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him" (Lk 17:3). So we *must* forgive the one who indicates regret for sin against us. That is when God forgives. But Christ on the cross and Stephen when being stoned both prayed that God would not hold accountable those who sinned against them, even though the murderers had not asked forgiveness (Lk 23:34; Acts 7:60). That said, as we note below, God's willingness to forgive, though universal (1 Tim 2:3-4; 2 Pet 3:9), is not unconditional. Repentance is required. Christ will say to some, "Depart from me" (Mt 7:23; 25:41; Lk 13:27). God does not "simply forgive"; justice demands repentance. In any event, an attempt at reconciliation is always my responsibility, no matter who the chief wrongdoer was. Besides, unforgiveness is a cancer that eats away at the spirit of the one who fails to forgive; so there is great healing value in forgiveness as a way of life, no matter how the offenders in one's life behave. And once we make the choice to forgive, we

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may have to *renew* that commitment to forgive when feelings of resentment or bitterness well up within us. Forgiveness does not mean forgetting, but it does mean not holding a person's sin against him.

In the process of forgiveness, Lewis Smedes writes, we first experience *hurt*. And when the hurt is extreme or acute, the tendency is to nurse this hurt and not let it go. It turns to *hate*. Unless we let go of our hatred and forgive, then we ourselves become imprisoned by this seething anger. Just as failure to confess our sins to God does damage to us (Ps 32:2-4). It is only when we release the wrong a person has done against us that we can find *healing*—and release from the prison we have built for ourselves and, if possible, reconciliation with others. The Christian increasingly realizes that the grace to forgive is anchored in the God who loves enemies and forgives.[9]

Not a few believers have wondered about the nature of God's forgiveness: When God promises that "their sin I will remember no more" (Jer 31:34), does this mean he can actually forget? No, this statement should not be taken any more literally than when God says that Judah's idolatrous practices never entered his mind (Jer 19:5). Forgetting is not *actual* but *judicial*. God cannot actually forget since this would compromise his omniscience. No, when God forgives, he no longer holds our sin against us but reckons us not guilty.

Another point: When Jesus tells his disciples to love and forgive their enemies, he is not absolutizing this command. He denounces his opponents in very harsh—even damning—terms in Matthew 23. Jesus himself did not absolutize turning the other cheek (see Jn 18:23) any more than he abolished the judicial principle of proportionality ("an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth") or all oath taking. Jesus exemplifies a spirit of remarkable forgiveness on the cross (Lk 23:34), and he calls on us to have a generous spirit of forgiveness as well. Yet even so, it is not absolute. First, for forgiveness to be complete, it presupposes the offender's repentance ("if he repents, forgive him" [Lk 17:3-4]). Second, even when Christ instructs his disciples to forgive extravagantly—"seventy times seven" (Mt 18:22)—he continues saying that those refusing to forgive will incur the wrath of their master and be "handed . . . over to the torturers" (Mt 18:34).

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To make the point clear, Jesus says, "My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart" (Mt 18:35). He uses strong words of unforgiveness when he says of Judas that it would have been better for him not to have been born (Mk 14:21), and when he says that the "blasphemy against the Spirit" (Mt 12:31) will not be forgiven. Third, it can be a misguided sentimentality—and a gross injustice—for Christians to call for the forgiveness of the likes of Osama bin Laden and other terrorists. We must ask: Is that our rightful place? Unlike the Son of God (Mk 2:5), how can we simply forgive the offenses of others? What about the victims of their assaults? Should we forgive terrorists while they are planning another attack? And does forgiveness require that we no longer use force to stop them? Or, rather than intervening, do we wait till terrorists and rapists have carried out their evil acts before we extend forgiveness to them? Finally, we note below, the state—though ordained by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ—has a different role in God's economy. Its business is not to forgive rapists or murderers but rather to punish evildoers—though tempered with mercy when appropriate.[10]

Reconciliation is always the ideal to pursue, as it exemplifies the gracious activity of God (Rom 5:10-11) and the goal of the disciple (Mt 5:9, 24). However, given the damage brought about by humanity's fall, *reconciliation* may not be possible even if *forgiveness* is genuinely given. A wife whose husband has repeatedly committed adultery may truly *forgive* him. But this does not entail being *reconciled* to him. The marriage covenant may have been so profoundly violated that restoring even a minimal level of trust becomes impossible. A child may have been sexually abused by her father; she may truly let go of her soul-damaging resentment and forgive him, but that does not mean she can ever get close to him.

Reconciliation is the ideal, and it may not always be attainable, and it certainly cannot come about without the repentance of the perpetrator. Whatever its shortcomings, South Africa's post-apartheid Truth and Reconciliation Commission has served as a powerful reminder that healing for racially motivated evils by whites against primarily blacks and "colored" persons cannot be achieved without naming and owning one's evil acts. Indeed, this is the point of C. S. Lewis's *The Great Divorce*—that enjoying

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God's presence in the afterlife cannot take place without repentance. It is our unconfessed sins that separate us from God, not his unwillingness to forgive (Is 59:1-2).

Love, the Character of God and the Divine Image

Theologian Anders Nygren has called love "the centre of Christianity, the Christian fundamental motif *par excellence.*"[11] Is this statement claiming too much for love? We have seen that the kind of love that characterizes God is enemy-love. God lovingly initiates reconciliation with his own enemies (Rom 5:6-10)—visibly demonstrated in Jesus' sacrificial death for us.

Great and sharp has been the contention over whether justice/righteousness or love is paramount in God's character. And how do his justice and his holy wrath against sin fit with his love? Some hold that righteousness is the comprehensive description and that love is an element of what is just or true. Others hold that love is the comprehensive category and that righteousness is one facet of love.

Perhaps we gain insight from the Croatia-born Yale theologian Miroslav Volf. He once thought that wrath, anger and judgment were beneath God—until he lived through the nightmare years of ethnic strife in the former Yugoslavia. He came to realize that his view of God had been *too low:*

> I used to think that wrath was unworthy of God. Isn't God love? Shouldn't divine love be beyond wrath? God is love, and God loves every person and every creature. That's exactly why God is wrathful against some of them. My last resistance to the idea of God's wrath was a casualty of the war in the former Yugoslavia, the region from which I come. According to some estimates, 200,000 people were killed and over 3,000,000 were displaced. My villages and cities were destroyed, my people shelled day in and day out, some of them brutalized beyond imagination, and I could not imagine God not being angry. Or think of Rwanda in the last decade of the past century, where 800,000 people were hacked to death in one hundred days! How did God react to the carnage? By doting on the perpetrators in a grandfatherly fashion? By refusing to condemn the bloodbath but instead affirming the perpetrators' basic goodness? Wasn't God fiercely angry with them? Though I used to complain about the indecency of the idea of God's wrath,

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> I came to think that I would have to rebel against a God who wasn't wrathful at the sight of the world's evil. God isn't wrathful in spite of being love. God is wrathful because God is love.[12]

As the apostle Paul wrote: "Behold then the kindness and severity of God" (Rom 11:22). Perhaps we can do no better than rejoice with the psalmist that "steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other" (Ps 85:10 RSV). This they did at the cross: when the Son of God died as our substitute, God met the demands of his just character as well as displayed his sacrificial love for humankind. As John Stott said, the essence of sin is humans taking the place of God whereas the essence of salvation is God taking the place of humans.[13] Certainly it is true that God's kind of righteousness cannot exist without love, and God's kind of love cannot exist without righteousness.

Yet it still could be argued that love is supremely important because it is not only essential to the triune, relational God but is arguably God's most notable characteristic. And God has made us in his image and designed us to love. And without love, no one can claim membership in the family of God (1 Jn 4:7-8). Indeed, it is love—not justice (or being just)—that is the identifying virtue of the disciple of Christ (Jn 13:35; cf. Col 3:14). Out of the love of the Trinity, God freely and graciously created a being that is not the "highest of the animals" but a "little less than God" (Ps 8:5); humans are capable of companionship and loving unity with God himself. God lovingly created these image bearers to commune or "walk with" him (Gen 3:8) and to rule creation with him (Gen 1:28)—to be priests and kings to God (cf. Rev 1:6; 5:10). Not only is this loving unity the central fact about God and the purpose of creation; it is also the purpose of redemption in restoring the image humanity marred. He did not restore humanity merely to prove his powers and defeat Satan. He was out to fulfill the original purpose—nothing less than loving union with himself. "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them" (Rev 21:3 NASB).

True love is so deep, so broad, so high that it is beyond understanding (Eph 3:18-19) and so requires divine revelation for us to know it. Somehow

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it is related to "all the fullness of God" (Eph 3:19)—that is, full maturity in Christ. But if Christ indeed lives in us through faith, we can be so established in the experience of love that *we* have the power to comprehend this greatest of all qualities (Eph 3:17-18).

The Incomparable Results of Love

The results of loving attitudes and behavior underscore the supreme importance of our theme. God's love for us provided life and salvation and now provides all that we need. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? . . . Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:35, 38-39 NIV). How great the results of God's love for us! But what of our love for God?

When we love God with the centrality of our being, in our choices and affections, with the concentration of all our mental powers, and with our own bodily strength (Mt 22:37), we not only prove to be his children and bring pleasure to him, but we validate all the other loves—friendship, family, erotic/romantic. Love for God opens the door for robust love all around! If we fail to hold love for God as the ultimate love, we can easily damage and diminish these other loves. For example, when parents put a child on the highest throne of affection and sacrifice responsibilities to God and obedience to his will for that child, the relationship to the child himself becomes warped and grotesque.

I (Robertson) enjoyed visiting the Nakamuras. God had rescued them from a miserable life at the brink of divorce and brought them into the family of God's people. Their six-year-old son, Hideyaki, was a great playmate for our youngest. One day I asked if they had any pictures of him. Did they! The first album, to my amazement, brought me only through the first six months of Hideyaki's life—pages and pages at his birth, pages for the first month "birthday," and then more pages for the first hundred days. The whole closet was full of albums almost exclusively of Hideyaki. What affection for an only son! Gradually the affection crowded out God's place and, inevitably, began to erode the affection of the couple for one another.

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But perhaps Hideyaki at least would benefit? The last I heard, he had broken the hearts of those adoring parents, falling deeper and deeper into a life of drugs and crime. The idolatrous affection not only destroyed the relationship with God and other relationships, it participated in the destruction of the very object of supreme devotion itself.

But love for God, when enthroned above all other loves, has the power to anchor the other loves, to give them direction and power, to fill them with meaning, discipline them, and lift them to their highest and best.

Above all other results, the person who lives in love actually lives in the realm or the sphere God inhabits (1 Jn 4:16)—God who is the source and ultimate goal of all our existence. This love we have for God, then, is not a vague sentimental abstraction. It means intentional discipleship involving down-to-earth acts of reconciliation, forgiveness and prayer for our enemies. It means attending to spiritual disciplines such as prayer, fasting, meditation and celebration—the cultivation of character-shaping habits through daily choices. It means obeying Christ's commands: "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (Jn 14:15). This is why love and obedience to Jesus' commandments and to "the law of Christ" cannot be separated—the theme we emphasize in this book and to which we now specifically turn.

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PART II

LAW

Why is law to some a hobgoblin of incarnate evil to be exorcised from life, while to others it is the only hope of salvation? What is law's purpose, and how can it be known?

A law is any rule or injunction that must be obeyed. In traditional religion, these rules normally make requirements of a ceremonial or ritual kind and of an ethical or moral kind. In fact, these laws are so prominent in most religions as to be considered the substance of those religions. This was true of the Jewish religious leaders in Christ's day, and it is true in much of Christendom today. Is this the biblical point of view? Certainly there are many laws in the Bible—613 Mosaic commandments and more than 600 direct commandments in the New Testament. Are they rules that must be obeyed? *Can* they be obeyed? If not, for what purpose were they given? Before these and other vital questions can be answered, it is important to permit the Bible itself to define the term.

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3

The Law

Its Definition and Purpose

Law and the Character of God

God created humankind in his own image, and this includes the moral dimension. There are other aspects of the divine image as well: rationality, relationality, creativity, spirituality, volition. The moral dimension is, of course, profound and significant. It has to do not only with our duties, but more fundamentally has to do with the formation of Christlike character. Christ is the very image of God and the true archetypal human. He came to live the human life as it should be lived and, through his redemptive work as the second Adam, helped restore fallen humanity and created a new humanity.

The fact that we have been shaped to be imitators of God (Eph 5:1) is the basis of shared love and fellowship with God; it is indispensable to demonstrating in human life the glorious character of God and thus displaying his glory (2 Cor 3:18). Alas, from the beginning of history, humans have been striving to become like God in knowledge and power: "you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen 3:5). At Babel, one line of self-sufficient humans said, "Let us make for ourselves a name [*šēm*]" (Gen 11:4)—in contrast to what God promised Abram: "I will make your name [*šēm*] great" (Gen 12:2 NIV). This ancient ambition to usurp the status of God is an attempt of the creature to displace the Creator. But far different is the goal to mirror the moral character of God. As we are imaging beings, we come to resemble what we worship. God commands us to "be holy, *for I*

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am holy" (Lev 19:2; 1 Pet 1:16 NIV). It is not optional. Since it is a divine imperative, we properly call this will of God *law.*

To deviate from God's character and commands is sin. The call to be holy will mean separating ourselves from sin. As "saints" or "set apart ones," we are to live up to our calling as God's holy people, pursuing a life that is in right alignment with the divine character. Without it no one will see God (Heb 12:14).

As Calvin said, "The law not only teaches, but also imperiously demands."[1] God's holiness demands conformity to his character and will, and the "law" of God expresses his purposes not only for our behavior but for our character as well (Gal 5:22-23). God's law is a reflection of God's character—although God's law may sometimes permit the less-than-ideal because of the hardness of human hearts (Mt 19:8). We can get an indication of who God is by studying his revelation in his law. So let's look at the biblical use of *law* more specifically.

Definitions of Law

How does the Bible use the term *law*? The dominant use of *law* in the Old and New Testaments is that of the law of Moses given at Mt. Sinai, but we see secondary uses of the term as well.

The Law as canonical Scripture. Moses, the great lawgiver, recorded the law in his writings, the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible); this was commonly called "the Law." The Hebrew Bible was divided into three sections, commonly called the Law, the Prophets and the Writings (or the first of that section, the Psalms). Thus Christ said that "everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled" (Lk 24:44 ESV). Here the "Law of Moses" clearly refers to the first division of the Hebrew Old Testament—the Pentateuch. But sometimes the Old Testament was simply referred to by two divisions, the Law and the Prophets (Mt 11:13; Lk 16:16; Rom 3:21). "The Law" could refer to the Old Testament as a whole, as when quotations made from "the Prophets" or from "the Psalms" are attributed to "the Law" (see Rom 3:19; 1 Cor 14:21; see also Mt 5:18; Lk 16:17; Jn 8:17; 10:34; 15:25). Thus "the Law" often refers to the Old Testament as a whole or to some part of it.

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The law of Moses. In the Old Testament, "law" or *torah* ("instruction") typically harks back to the Mosaic law given at Mt. Sinai. The book of Deuteronomy uses a cluster of terms referring back to the Mosaic law—*commandments, laws, testimonies, statutes, precepts, charge* (Deut 4:45; 6:17; 11:1; etc.). In Psalm 119, the psalmist uses these same terms to refer to the law of Moses—and takes utter delight in them for their wisdom and guidance. The prophets are continually reminding the people of Israel of the Mosaic law and their covenant obligations to live under it as God's people. For example, "I wrote for them the many things of my law, but they regarded them as something foreign" (Hos 8:12 NIV); "they have rejected the law of the LORD and have not kept his decrees" (Amos 2:4 NIV); and "remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb [i.e., Sinai] for all Israel" (Mal 4:4 NIV). Israel was to respond to God's grace by gratefully obeying the Mosaic law: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt. . . . You shall have no other gods before me" (Ex 20:1-3 NIV). If Israel did so, God promised material/physical blessings of life, health, prosperity, abundance and safety (Lev 26:1-13; Deut 4:32-40; 28:1-14; cf. Deut 28–32). For disobedience, God threatened curses, what one scholar has called the ten "D's": death, disease, drought, dearth, danger, destruction, defeat, deportation, destitution, disgrace.[2]

In the New Testament, Paul is the predominant writer on the "law" (*nomos*). The general consensus of New Testament scholars is that when Paul uses the term *law,* it virtually always refers to the Mosaic law (Ex 20–Deut) given at Mt. Sinai, when God made a covenant with Israel.[3] Those "under the law" are Jews: "To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law [the Jew] I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law). . . . To those not having the law [Gentiles] I became like one not having the law" (1 Cor 9:20-21 NIV). And when Paul uses the phrase "works of the law," he *always* refers to "the Jewish Law, the Torah" given at Sinai.[4]

When Paul affirms that no one can be justified "by the works of the law" (Rom 3:20 NIV), he is saying the law of Moses with circumcision, food laws and special days is no longer a mark of the people of God. What's more, no

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one can gain right standing or be declared righteous ("justified") by keeping the Mosaic law (cf. Gal 2:6; see also Rom 4:14; 6:4, 15; Gal 3:2, 5, 10, 18; Phil 3:9). The implication is that if the Jews, having the best law around, could not find salvation through it, then *no* works of any inferior Gentile legal system can render us right or not guilty before God—or help us overcome sin's power.[5]

Furthermore, Paul speaks of certain Gentiles, who, though not having the law, have the law written on the heart (Rom 2:14-15). According to some scholars, Paul is speaking of God's moral law available to those without special revelation. Now, it is true that human beings, made in God's image, are capable of recognizing basic moral truths. Indeed, when God judges—or threatens to judge—nations surrounding Old Testament Israel, the presumption is that these nations should have known better than to carry out conscience-stifling acts (e.g., Amos 1–2). Yet other interpreters look to Romans 2:28-29 as an amplification of 2:14-15. They state that this passage refers to *Gentile believers* who, under the new covenant in Christ, have the law of Moses placed within their hearts by the Spirit. They are true Jews—true children of Abraham—whose hearts have been circumcised (cf. Rom 4; Gal 4; Phil 3:3)—so that they keep the purport or the moral heart of the law of Moses.

Other uses of "law." *The law as obedience.* Sometimes the term *law* is used figuratively to refer to a person's obedient response to the law. When Paul says, "if justification were through the law" (Gal 2:21 RSV), he obviously is not speaking of the commandments themselves, but rather of the idea that a person can achieve acceptance as righteous through obeying the law. The same thought is found in his reference to the "works of the law" (Rom 3:20) and the recurring teaching that "no one is justified by the Law before God" (Gal 3:11). Paul meant no one is justified by *obedience* to the law. "By the works of the Law no flesh shall be justified" (Gal 2:16; see also Rom 4:14; 6:4, 15; Gal 3:2, 5, 10, 18; Phil 3:9).

The law of God/Christ. Significantly, Paul distinguishes between the "law" of Moses and the "law of God" (1 Cor 9:20-21; cf. Rom 7:25). The reason Paul does not see the Christian under the Mosaic law—the old covenant—is that a new order has come in Christ. We are bound by "the

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law of God" (1 Cor 9:20-21) and "the commandments of God" (1 Cor 7:19; cf. 1 Jn 2:3-4)—not the Mosaic law given to national Israel.

What, then, is this "law of God" or "law of Christ" (Gal 6:2)? This "new law" under which we live is the authoritative teaching of Christ and by implication the New Testament's apostolic witness. Like Moses ascending Mt. Sinai to bring the law to ancient Israel, Jesus as the "new Moses" ascends a mountain and teaches the multitudes "as one having authority" (Mt 5:1-2; 7:29). It is this teaching which fulfills, embodies and brings to completion the Old Testament Scriptures for the new covenant community. For the New Testament writers, Christ in his life, death, resurrection and ascension becomes the authoritative interpretive filter—the hermeneutical key—through which we fully understand and apply the Old Testament. Jesus is God's agent to bring the much anticipated end-times kingdom (or reign) of God into human history; the first coming of Jesus ushered in the "latter" or "last days" (Acts 2:14-21; 1 Tim 4:1; Heb 1:1-2; 2 Tim 3:1-7; 1 Jn 2:18), and Christ's teaching and mission clarify what God's law for us is in these last days.[6]

This new covenant has implications that burst out of Israel's nationalistic boundaries and ethnocentrism that kept them from being a light to the nations. In light of the Christ event and the gospel opening the door to the Gentiles, circumcision and uncircumcision do not matter (7:19).[7]

The law of faith and the law of works. In Romans 3:27-28, Paul writes: "Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law." Here "law" for Paul seems to mean something like "operating principle." In the context, Paul emphasizes that by the "law of faith," Jew and Gentile alike are "one" family and people in Christ (Rom 3:29-30)—not two. Living by the "law of works," which involves Torah-based dividing lines between Jews and Gentiles (circumcision, kosher diet, special days), runs contrary to the promise God made to Abraham to bless the nations (Rom 4; cf. Gen 12:1-3). Paul states that those ethnic status symbols in Judaism actually hinder the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise of incorporating Gentiles into God's family.

Paul then goes on to elaborate in Romans 4 that Abraham himself was

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justified by faith (Gen 15:6) *before* he was circumcised (Gen 17)—and, perhaps more importantly, hundreds of years before the law of Moses was given at Mt. Sinai (Rom 4:10-13). This "operating principle" of "the law of faith" is the one by which God justifies the ungodly (Rom 4:5) and by which Abraham was declared righteous. This principle of faith excludes boasting.

This use of *law* as "operating principle" applies to a "law of righteousness" (Rom 9:31), which the Jews did not follow by faith (9:32). Unlike what many Jews thought, God's law of righteousness, which brings one into right standing before the covenant-making God (being "justified") is not identical to the law of Moses, which could not justify.

Keeping God's Commandments

Contrary to the situation ethicist (see chapter ten), love for God and others is connected to commands, laws and duties—and, of course, godly character. These are an expression of the will of God for us. Some theologians have argued that living under grace rather than law (Rom 6:14) means that grace is utterly disconnected from law. As we have seen, however, there is a "law of God," a "law of Christ" and a "law of righteousness" under which we live. Indeed, in Romans 5–8, Paul uses the Old Testament's exodus language—of deliverance from slavery in Egypt—to remind us of the freedom and redemption we have in Christ. In the "new exodus" through a new Moses figure, we have been set free from sin and death by the "law of the Spirit of life" (Rom 8:2).

To pit "law" against "grace" is unfortunate. John 1:17 says that even the law of Moses was a *gift* of grace for national Israel—even though this covenant was temporary. With the coming of the incarnate Word, we have received *grace in addition to grace.* Even in Eden, God's *command* not to eat of the tree presupposes a *provision* to keep God's command. As theologian Scott Hafemann observes, every *command* of God is a *promise* in disguise, and every *promise* of God is a *command* in disguise.[8] For example, God's command not to murder implies that we should trust in God to deal justly with evildoers; God's command not to steal or covet implies that we should trust God to provide for our needs. *Disobedience* reflects a *lack of*

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trust in God's promises and provision. As 1 Corinthians 10:13 reminds us, God's empowering presence is always available to enable us to obey.

Likewise, we are not saved or rescued from sin by works (of the law); it is by gracious gift through faith—that is, *commitment to* God and *entrusting ourselves to* God and his redemptive work in Christ. Yet we are saved *for* good works that God has prepared beforehand (Eph 2:8-10). This is what Paul refers to as the "obedience of faith" (Rom 1:5) or the "work of faith" (1 Thess 1:3)—that is, work that is bound up with a life of faith. Paul said he "labored more" than all the apostles, but this was according to God's working within him (1 Cor 15:10; Col 1:29).

Our works are the *result* of God's gracious salvation, not the *cause* of it. God's *grace* instructs us to deny ungodliness and worldliness and to be zealous to do good deeds (Tit 2:12-14). As someone has put it, the Christian faith is a *religion of gratitude:* our good works flow from the salvation God has already wrought or worked within us (Phil 2:12). Thus we will be judged by our deeds precisely because these are an expression of trust in God's provision and promises (Rom 2:12; 14:10; 2 Cor 5:10). As we have *begun* the Christian life by faith in Jesus Christ, so we *continue* by faith as well (Col 2:6-7). So living the Christian life is *not* following a code of ethics. It is life oriented around Christ ("in Christ") and lived by the Spirit's power; that is, the Christian life is living in relationship with Christ, living in a new sphere or realm shaped by Christ, who gives to us a new identity as part of the new creation (2 Cor 5:17).

We should add that since God himself is our standard, the standard is *universal, applying to persons across the ages*. God's moral standard, since it is anchored in the triune God and to be lived out in dependence on him, is also *personal*—not some dead code.

In Plato's *Euthyphro* dialogue, Socrates raises the question about whether something is holy because the gods arbitrarily approve it or whether the gods approve of some independent moral standard outside themselves because it is holy. Goodness is not arbitrary, nor is there some good standard independent of God—some free-floating platonic ideal or "natural law," for example. Rather, God's good character is that standard, which serves as the origin and the basis for the moral commands he issues.

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Because of God's good character, he does not have to jump through a set of cosmic moral hoops. Rather, God acts and by nature does what is good. His commands (what we could call "the right") flow from his intrinsic worthiness and value ("the good"). God issues commands so that we who have been made in his image might reflect his character. His purpose in redemption is to restore that marred image.

And why should be become like him?

Purpose of the Law

The law as a guide. The law of God is often likened to light for guidance (e.g., Ps 119:105). And God's law is directed at the disobedient to restrain evil (1 Tim 1:9-10). Where virtue abounds, the law (Mosaic or otherwise) is not necessary (Gal 5:23). Law is given not for the sake of upright people, but because of the rebellious and disobedient (1 Tim 1:9-10). As Pliny the Younger wrote about the Roman Republic, "The more corrupt the Republic, the more laws." In other words, the multiplication of laws is a telltale sign of declining of moral character. If the moral character of individuals and families in society is intact, then adding more laws is not necessary. Law does not create moral people, but it frequently reminds us of moral failure. Likewise, God's law does not control evil people, but it is a retarding influence on the forces of evil in the world. Some call this the *political* use of the law. By moral standards a society is held together. When moral standards loosen, a community or nation begins to come apart.

This serves as a reminder of the dangers of mere rule-keeping. Keeping rules is not problematic in itself. The problem arises when rules are ends in themselves and are detached from a broader framework of a developing (or developed) virtuous character as well as a loving relationship with God and others.

The law as provoking sin. Like the light in the washroom, God's law reveals humanity's moral defilement (Rom 3:20; 7:7). By the law comes the knowledge of sin. If I do not believe I am dirty, I will not seek cleansing. If I do not think I am lost, I will not welcome a rescuer. But if I know that I am polluted and incapable of doing that which I wish to do, I will seek a savior and welcome him. This is the "custodian" work of the law that brings us to

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Christ (Gal 3:24). The law in Paul's sense here is like a teacher ("tutor" or "schoolmaster")—one who would attend to a child until he came of legal age.

For the sinner, the law makes sin very plain, "sinful beyond measure" (Rom 7:13 ESV). Thus the terrifying law condemns us and is designed to make people seek a way of escape. The law can often make us aware of our failure and prompt us to cast ourselves on God's mercy; we could call this the *evangelistic* use of the law. Of course, more often than not, God's *kindness* leads to repentance (Rom 2:4), and Jesus himself mentions the benefits of salvation—finding rest (Mt 11:28-30) and abundant life (Jn 10:10), having thirst quenched and hunger satisfied (Jn 4:14; 6:35)—without mentioning repentance. The assumption is that people already recognize their deepest need. But if a person does not flee to the cross, the law becomes the basis for her judgment in the last day rather than a means of grace (Rom 3:19).

For the Christian, the law has an entirely different function. Like a car's headlights, the law for the Christian shows the way he must go if he is to reach the destination of being like Jesus. "God is light and in him is no darkness at all. . . . If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 Jn 1:5-7 ESV). For the believer, God's law has a *spiritual or instructional* (didactic) purpose: "And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I command you this day for your good?" (Deut 10:12-13 ESV).

And even for unbelievers, the more closely they follow God's ways, the more their life will align with the way they as human beings have been designed.

Conscience: An Inner "Law"

Although the Old Testament does not use the term *conscience,* the idea is there (1 Sam 24:5; 2 Sam 24:10; Jer 31:33; Amos 1–2), and it is explicitly taught in the New Testament (Acts 24:16; Rom 2:14-15; 2 Cor 1:12; 1 Tim 1:5; 2 Tim 1:3; Heb 10:2, 22).

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The conscience is the human capacity to make moral judgments (2 Cor 4:2; 1 Tim 4:2), and it also serves as a witness to either affirm or condemn one's moral behavior (Rom 2:14-15; 2 Cor 1:12). Of course, our conscience is partly influenced by parents and society and thus is not infallible. However, Scripture teaches that we have a deep or innate moral awareness: everyone knows that there is right and wrong, and we have a general idea of how we ought to be treated if our conscience is functioning reasonably and hasn't been suppressed and cauterized (Rom 1:18; 1 Tim 4:2).

Moreover, the conscience does not always have enough information to make the right judgment, and one's moral judgment becomes all the more obscured by separation from God, the source of moral light. The fallen human mind is inclined to suppress the knowledge of the right, to distort the moral light it does have. Consequently, "Let your conscience be your guide" can be a dangerous maxim.

Though a person's moral judgment is often untrustworthy, it can become more finely tuned and increasingly reliable. This is all the more so for the believer, whose regenerated mind has been renewed by the Spirit and molded by study of the Word of God and submission to it. We are transformed by a renewed mind (Rom 12:2; cf. Mt 22:37) and made more like Christ (2 Cor 3:18). As our minds are renewed, our conscience will become more reliable. As we will note in part four ("Virtues and Vices"), although unbelievers can develop morally, special revelation is still needed. For example, despite Aristotle's remarkable moral sensitivity in many ways, he still despised the idea of humility and the idea of being in anyone's debt. Of course, this is a huge problem for sinners in need of gracious outside assistance from God. The Christ event is significant for informing and shaping the conscience. And we turn to Christ and the law in the next chapter.

Excursus: Paul, James and Justification by Faith/Works

A common question on faith and works relates to Paul's relationship to James. Paul writes, "For we maintain that a man is justified *by faith* apart from works of the Law" (Rom 3:28). Yet James writes, "You see that a man is justified *by works* and not by faith alone" (Jas 2:24). Who is correct?

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Both! In terms of audience and context, Paul and James have different concerns in mind and thus use terms differently; this is particularly evident in the latter part of James 2.[9] So let us briefly examine how they understand *works, faith* and *justify.*

How do Paul and James understand *works?* Paul speaks against works as a confidence in Jewish status anchored in keeping Mosaic laws concerning circumcision, diet and special days; without saving faith, such "boundary markers" are to no avail. Faith, love and new birth count—not circumcision or uncircumcision (Gal 5:6; 6:15). By contrast, James emphasizes *good deeds* that flow from grace and the development of Christlike character (as Paul emphasizes in Eph 2:10): the audience to whom James is writing "knows nothing of the tension with the Mosaic law that animated Paul."[10] In some sense, though, James's message can be grasped once Paul's message has been understood. Paul speaks about a faith that works (Gal 5:6; Eph 2:10; Tit 2:11-12). The *difference* between Paul and James consists in the *sequence* of works and conversion: Paul denies that works have any merit for acceptance in God's eyes *before* conversion; James is pleading for the absolute necessity of *post*-conversion works.

How do Paul and James understand *faith*? Following Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, both Paul and James repudiate a "faith" that is mere verbal profession—like the faith of the demons (Jas 2:19). Fallen angels "believe" there is one God; in contrast to James's audience, at least they tremble! In context, "faith" is mere intellectual doctrinal agreement. But Paul would not call this saving faith any more than James does. *Saying* and *hearing* Christ's words but not *doing* them are condemned by both (2 Tim 3:5; Tit 1:16; Jas 1:22-27; cf. Mt 7:21-26).

How do Paul and James use the term *justify?* They specifically acknowledge that Abraham was declared righteous when he trusted God's promise, both citing Genesis 15:6 (Rom 4:2-3; Jas 2:21). For Paul, *justify* means "declared righteous/not guilty" by God. *James,* on the other hand, uses it to mean "to confirm" the faith Abraham had when he offered up Isaac. So if Abraham was *already* declared righteous in Genesis 15:6, he could not be declared righteous by offering up Isaac (Gen 22)—only *proved* righteous.

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So we see Paul and James are unified, not at odds, in their understanding of salvation and the importance of good works as evidence of that faith.

The law of love. When James speaks of the royal law (Jas 2:8) or the "law of liberty" (Jas 2:12), the reference is to the specific law of love ("love your neighbor as yourself")—a summary of our obligation toward fellow humans. This recalls the new covenant promises that God's law would be placed in believers' hearts (Jer 31:33). So not to love our neighbor at one point, whether committing adultery or murdering or showing partiality (Jas 2:9-11), amounts to failure to keep the *whole* law—in this case, commands related to neighbor-love. In James 1:25, this "law of liberty" centers on love of our neighbors in our conversation and in caring for those who are in need (Jas 1:19, 27).

Furthermore, God's commands are not burdensome (1 Jn 5:3) because we live by a "law of liberty"; that is, we are freed to serve and love others because we have been loved and accepted by God in Christ. Under the new covenant, God by his Spirit gives believers *knowledge* of his will, a *desire* to obey and *empowerment* to live as they should as they continue to be shaped into Christ's character.

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4

The Law, Christ, Salvation History and Obedience

Civil, Ceremonial and Moral?

At the very beginning of human existence, some of God's will for humanity was revealed: humans were to be fruitful, to participate with God in ruling creation, and to commune with God in their earthly Edenic sanctuary (Gen 1:26-28; 3:8). But humans received a moral prohibition as well—not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:17). Some will raise the question, how could our first ancestors be held accountable if they didn't even know the difference between good and evil? True, they did *not* know what evil was, but they did recognize their moral obligation to *trust* their generous and good Creator; clearly, they had a duty to take God at his word rather than trust the voice of a stranger in the Garden.

Even without Mosaic regulations about animal sacrifices in Genesis, humans were still readily aware of sin, guilt, shame and the need for atonement or "covering" for that sin. Humans knew about sin, to be sure. How else could it "crouch at the door" like some wild animal ready to pounce (Gen 4:7)? God held humans morally responsible for their actions. As God told Cain, "you must master it."

Later in the law of Moses, God commanded circumcision, food laws (no pork or shellfish), sacrifices, regulations for planting (no two crops in one field) and clothing (not wearing clothing with two different fibers). Their laws regarding diet, clothing, farming, sex, bodily discharges and worship served as constant practical reminders that they were to live as

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God's "set apart" people in every area of life. They were not to be "mixed in" with the immoral practices and false worship of other nations.

Some scholars have attempted to offer guidance by "tidily" distinguishing between *moral, civil* and *ceremonial* laws in Torah, but this will not do. All of these 613 Mosaic laws were *moral* laws for Israel. To violate them was to disobey God. Yet not all of these commands were enduring *universal* laws for all people at all times. On top of this, neither Jesus nor the writers of the New Testament made this threefold distinction. How then do we sort out what is temporary and what is not?

Some say that only requirements that are rooted in the nature of God should be considered binding. But who is to decide which teachings qualify? Does not *that* person become the real authority rather than Scripture? And where in the Bible is such a principle given? Others say that only what is repeated in the New Testament or only what is repeated in the Epistles is binding for the Christian. But Jesus and the apostles seemed ignorant of such a principle. They both consistently quoted the Hebrew Scriptures as the ultimate authority—the only "Bible" they had. Furthermore, in the apostolic writings, the teachings of Christ were considered ultimately authoritative. It would surely surprise them to have his words set aside in favor of theirs.

Let's dig a bit more deeply.

Jesus as Fulfiller of the Old Testament

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them" (Mt 5:17 NIV). In what way does Jesus *fulfill* the Law and Prophets? Consider the following ways.

First, *Jesus brings to fruition the significance of the entire Old Testament.*[1] "*Fulfill*" translates a rich word (*plēroō*) that goes beyond merely fulfilling predictions. It includes completing, embodying, bringing to maturity or perfection. Jesus is the true Son that national Israel was not. He lives out Israel's story, passing through the waters of baptism (a reenactment of the Red Sea crossing; cf. 1 Cor 10:2), endures temptation forty days and nights, calls twelve disciples, declares a new law from another mountain, and sets

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apart a new kingdom community (Mt 21:43). So when Hosea 11:1 says, "Out of Egypt I called my son" (NIV) it was *originally* referring to ethnic Israel's deliverance from Egypt. When this passage is cited as "fulfilled" in Matthew 2:15, it does not indicate that Hosea had *predicted* Jesus' coming out of Egypt. Rather, Jesus—God's true, faithful Son—is the climax of Israel's story, bringing it to full significance. In this case, he is the faithful Israelite who comes out of Egypt; he is the true Son, with whom God was well-pleased (Mt 3:17). He is the new deliverer in the new exodus and establishes the new covenant community of God's people. He and those "in the Messiah" are the true Israel (Rom 2:28-29; 9:6; Phil 3:3). This is not to deny that there are predictions of a coming Messiah and kingdom (e.g., Is 9:6; Mic 5:2; cf. Mt 2:5-6). But many more prophecies are much broader than this.[2]

Jesus is both the *goal* of the Mosaic law and the *end* or termination of it (Rom 10:4). He would bring this to completion by becoming *the* sacrificial lamb to satisfy the demands of the law—and the curse and exile for disobeying it—once for all. In doing so, he destroyed the law's power to condemn. By enacting the reality foreshadowed in the symbolism of the ceremonial laws, he brought them to an end (Heb 7:26-28; 9:1, 9-10, 23-27). He "declared all foods clean" (Mk 7:19) even before the cross; thus he set aside all the dietary regulations, which were a boundary marker to set the Israelites apart from the nations.

Second, *Jesus fulfills the Old Testament as the one who inaugurates God's in-breaking kingdom in human history:* "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt 4:17). As the "new Moses," Jesus delivered his upside-down kingdom demands to his disciples. In the Sermon on the Mount, he emphasized how *disciples are different* (Mt 5:14-16; 6:1-2, 5, 8, 16, 32-33; 7:13-14). Jesus taught how countercultural the disciple is to be in his *character* and *behavior.* And he spoke all of this with noticeable authority (Mt 7:29), emphasizing repeatedly in Matthew 5, "But I say to you"—in addition to being the ultimate judge of human beings (Mt 7:21-23). Contrary to what liberal theology has stressed, Jesus' authority is not found in his reaffirming universally agreed-on moral truths. Rather, his authority is anchored in his unique status as God's incarnate Son and as the Messiah who brings God's rule or reign onto the human scene.

Third, Jesus fulfills the Old Testament in that *virtues and moral behavior*

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found therein are to characterize the new covenant community. Jesus is the head of a renewed community who participate in a new exodus and a renewed creation. Jesus is not so much teaching some new ethic in Matthew 5-7 and elsewhere, but he anchors his teaching in the moral heart of the Old Testament in anticipation of new covenant blessings. Consider, for example, how Jesus utilizes Isaiah 61 in the Beatitudes (see table 4.1).

Table 4.1. Use of Isaiah 61 in the Beatitudes

Isaiah 61	The Beatitudes (Matthew 5)
vv. 1-2: good news to the oppressed . . . the year of the LORD's favor.	v. 3: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
vv. 1-3: to bind up the brokenhearted . . . to comfort all who mourn.	v. 4: Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
v. 7: They will inherit a double portion in their land.	v. 5: Blessed are the humble, for they shall inherit the earth.
v. 3: They will be called oaks of righteousness.	v. 6: Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.
vv. 10-11: I will rejoice greatly in the Lord. . . . So the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.	v. 10: Blessed are those who have been persecuted for . . . righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. . . . Rejoice and be glad.

In his resurrection, Jesus ushered in a new creation (2 Cor 5:17), and the community of believers are part of this fertile new creation as they exhibit the Spirit's fruit (Gal 5:22-23), anticipated in Isaiah 32 and Isaiah 57:15-19, which mention "fruit of the Spirit" and "joy," "peace," "patience"—along with righteousness, justice and confidence.[3]

Further, Jesus brings out the perfect, ultimate moral significance of the Old Testament: murder is wrong, to be sure, but so is hatred (Mt 5:21-22); adultery is sinful, but so is lust (Mt 5:27). We see Jesus fulfilling the Old Testament in explaining its moral significance for the new covenant community.

Fourth, *Jesus fulfilled the law by obeying it.* Though he considered all foods clean and raised challenges about the sabbath, Jesus did not attempt to subvert the law but typically kept its requirements (Lk 23:41; 2 Cor 5:21). Thus he became the model and exemplar of what it means to live under the law as a faithful Israelite (Gal 4:4-5).

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In a remarkable statement affirming Jesus' deity and supreme moral character, he said, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (Jn 14:9). How blessed we are in the age of grace—we can see God in Jesus Christ. This does not mean that we can be right with God by imitating his Son. No, salvation is the free gift of redemption from slavery, of being adopted into God's family, of being declared not guilty ("justified") by virtue of Christ's death on our behalf. This status we receive by faith in Christ. But we were "created in Christ Jesus for good works" (Eph 2:10), and he has clearly demonstrated that life since he came to do the will of the Father (Jn 4:34; 14:31; 15:10). True, we do not follow him in his living "under the Law" (Gal 4:4-5), whose demands he himself would fulfill on our behalf (Rom 8:3), nor do we imitate him in his unique ministry as the Son of God and Savior. But in his faithful reproduction of the character of the Father, he is our sure and certain example.

Furthermore, Jesus' death was more than the fulfillment of the law in the sense of paying the penalty demanded by the law. It is also our example of supreme godlikeness. In fact, he put on display the highest form of love—complete sacrifice of self, even for one's enemy (Rom 5:8). Never had the world even imagined such love. And it became the foundation for Christian behavior as well as the source of Christian life. The preaching of Christ and him crucified gives new shape and content to biblical ethics. "For God," Paul insists, "did not call us for uncleanness, but in holiness" (1 Thess 4:7 RSV). "And he died for all," he repeats, "that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised" (2 Cor 5:15 ESV).

In this fact Paul finds the motive for holy living. That is why Paul never tires of relating the obligations of morality to the fact that Christ died for us. Is it a matter concerning *domestic relationship*? "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Eph 5:25 ESV). Is it a matter concerning the weaker brother? "Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died" (Rom 14:15 RSV). Is it a matter of *ambitious rivalry*? Have the mind of Christ, who emptied himself, took the form of a slave and became obedient to death on a cross (Phil 2:5-8). Is it a matter of *daily living*? "Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself

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up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph 5:2 RSV). Is it a matter of *sexual morality*? "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit? . . . You were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (1 Cor 6:19-20 RSV). The writers of the New Testament consistently appeal to Christ's work on Calvary—to an accomplished redemption through loving sacrifice—as a ground and a motive of holy living.[4]

Christ fulfilled the law by fulfilling another prophecy: He sent the Holy Spirit as foretold by the prophet Joel (Acts 2:17-21). The day of Pentecost marked the birth of a new people of God, the church—the bringing together of believing Jews and Gentiles (Rom 9–11; Eph 3) in fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise (Gen 12:1-3). In establishing the church (Mt 16:18), Jesus established a new way of administering God's people here on earth—no longer a theocratic entity with political and military power. Christ spoke of a kingdom not "of this world" (Jn 18:36). In establishing the church, the workings of God's kingdom purposes through national Israel were no longer operative.

Jesus brought substance to what was previously shadow, as Hebrews highlights. He drew out the law's inner meaning and radicalized it. Throughout his ministry, he consistently affirmed the Old Testament as the authoritative Word of God (e.g., Mt 5:17-19; 23:23). Furthermore, Jesus clearly identified with the Law and the Prophets to reinforce his own teaching. His criticism of the law was primarily of the Pharisaic interpretations of the law (e.g., Mt 5:20, 38) and the human-made traditions added to the law (Mt 15:1-9; 23). And Paul would add that authoritative significance of the law for the people of God was no longer binding with the new covenant community created by the Messiah and directed by the indwelling Spirit (Rom 8:14; Gal 5:18).

And Jesus, as the full revelation of God and his character (Jn 1:18; 14:9), appropriated the Old Testament's enduring truths about God's nature and his will for humankind, giving it clarity, definition and depth in light of his mission. The Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5–7) is the most concentrated example of clarifying the law, but this approach permeated all his teaching. He gives a "new law" for his new community, which bears his distinctive authority ("*I* say unto you").

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Furthermore, it is this whole body of teaching—all that he commanded—with which we are to disciple the nations (Mt 28:18-20). Only those specific laws of the Old Testament or those categories of law (dietary, ceremonial, civil) that he set aside may we set aside on *his* authority.

The Law and Salvation History: A Brief Look at Romans 7

Romans 7:7-25 has long puzzled believers. Paul is saying, "I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out." "Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me." "[I am] a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me" (Rom 7:18, 21-23 NIV). Is Paul speaking as a defeated believer? An unbeliever? The answer is certainly debated, but some important themes emerge as we seek to understand the believer's relation to the law.

Theologians have used the term *salvation history* to speak of God's saving activity in human history. This is important for our understanding of Romans 7: the old era with its "power structures" dominated by *Adam,* the *law,* the *flesh* and *death* has been abolished and displaced through Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus is the "new man" or "second Adam" (Rom 5; 1 Cor 15) and as the obedient Son the true Israel that national Israel failed to be (Is 1:2-3; Hos 11:1; cf. Mt 2:15; 3:17). Jesus is the founder of a new humanity and a new covenant people, and the failure of the old humanity and old covenant people is highlighted in Romans 7.

Romans 7:7-25 can be divided into two sections that reflect national Israel's salvation history. In the first section, Paul is speaking representatively as a Jew experiencing the tyranny of the law *when it was given at Mt. Sinai* (note the *past* tense verbs in Rom 7:7-12).[5] In the second section, it refers to Jews *continuing* to live under the law (note the *present* tense verbs in Rom 7:13-25). Because *Spirit-inspired faith* did not ground obedience to the Mosaic law for most Israelites (e.g., Heb 3:17), the law merely helped expose human powerlessness over sin, led to frustration, and even provoked sin, resulting in condemnation.

In Romans 7, Paul seems to be describing life under the law from three angles:

- Paul's past experience as an unbelieving Jew under the Mosaic law

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- The experience of all Jews under the Mosaic law
- The experience of living "in Adam" (see Paul's references to Genesis 3 in Rom 7:9, 11)

When the law was *given at Sinai* (Rom 7:7-12), it provoked sin. Paul identifies with national Israel as though he was at Sinai at the giving of the law. Then, while *living under the law,* Israelites could not overcome the power of sin, which was aggravated by the law (Rom 7:13-25). What about Paul's use of the pronoun "I"? This reflects the story of the people of Israel under the law—and thus his own story; this story did not include living by faith as Abraham did (Rom 4; cf. Gen 15:6). While the Jew took delight in the law of Moses and knew the will of God very specifically, the Jew still failed to keep the law in which he gloried! So *before* Sinai, sin was not as active and powerful; sin was "dead" to Israel in this sense (Rom 5:13; 7:8). But when the law was given at Sinai, it produced all kinds of evil desires (Rom 7:7-12). After Sinai, the Jew felt strongly how the law was unable to free him from sin's power (Rom 7:13-25).

Elsewhere in Romans, Paul refers to Jews who have failed to live by faith while following the Mosaic law; they are "in the flesh" and "under the law" and "in Adam." This is a different category or realm from the new creation inaugurated by Christ's death and resurrection; this includes freedom Christ brings from sin, death, the law, and the flesh. By comparing texts in Romans 5–8, we see that Paul is not speaking as a Christian in Romans 7:7-25. Rather he speaks as a Jew—and for all Jews—living without faith under the Mosaic law. Paul is not speaking so much *individually* of his own private experience—though that is included—but *corporately* in identification with Jews under the law.

There may be overlap experientially between the Christian, on the one hand, and the Jew living under the law without faith, on the other—for example, feeling thwarted and frustrated at giving in to sin, being profoundly aware of one's own sin, struggling with selfish desires. However, Paul's specific terminology in Romans 5–8 reflects that a new era in salvation history has dawned: God in Christ has defeated the power of the law to enslave and condemn. We are no longer "in Adam" or "under the

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law" or "in the flesh": "you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit" (Rom 8:9). We are "in Christ," "in the Spirit," and no longer "under the law." The old has passed away and the new has come (2 Cor 5:17).

Table 4.2. Romans 7:7-25 Compared with Surrounding Sections

Romans 7:7-25	Surrounding Sections: Romans 5–8
7:8: "But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded **by the commandment** ['You shall not covet'], **produced in me every kind of covetous desire.** . . . When the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I **died.**"	**7:5:** "For when we [in the past] **were controlled by [the flesh], the sinful passions aroused by the law** were at work, so that we **bore** fruit for **death.**"
7:14: "but I am . . . sold as a **slave to sin.**"	**6:20:** "When you were **slaves to sin.**" **6:7:** "that we should **no longer be slaves to sin**—because anyone who has died has been **freed from sin.**"
7:14: "The Law is **spiritual**; but I am **of flesh.**"	**8:9:** "But you are **not in the flesh but in the Spirit [i.e., *spiritual*].**"
7:25: "in the [flesh I am] a slave to **the law of sin.**"	**8:2:** "through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from **the law of sin and death.**"
7:17, 20: "**sin living** in me."	**8:9:** "**the Spirit** of God **lives** in you."
7:24: "Who will set me free from the **body of this death**?"	**6:6:** "that the **body of sin** might be done away with that we should no longer be slaves to sin."
7:25: "I . . . in my mind am **a slave to God's law**."	**7:4:** "you also **died to the law.**"

Compare the language of being in Romans 7:7-25 and surrounding sections of Romans 5–8. As shown in table 4.2, the language of Romans 7:7-25 compared with the rest of Romans 5–8 tilts the scales *away* from thinking that Paul is writing as a Christian. The Christian is not "in the flesh [*sarx*]" (Rom 8:9; cf. Rom 7:5), unlike the Jews under the law: "I am of flesh (*sarkanos*), sold into bondage to sin" (7:14). Being "in the flesh" in Romans 8:1-11 refers to the unsaved person, one *without the Spirit,* like the "natural" person in 1 Corinthians 2:14-15. Like the law, all believers are "spiritual" because they have the Spirit; however, believers not walking by the Spirit can live as mere unredeemed "fleshly" humans (1 Cor 3:1-3).

Some might reply, Didn't Jesus come in the "flesh" (Jn 1:14), and

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doesn't Paul live his life "in the flesh" (Gal 2:20)? Yes, this use of "flesh" simply refers to *life in the body,* and Scripture sometimes uses "flesh" in this neutral way. However, Paul's use of *flesh* is often connected to salvation history (life before Christ) and the significance of the Christ event. Paul is saying that we believers no longer live "according to the flesh"—that is, according to earth- or human-centered priorities and efforts that were typical of our life "in Adam" or "the old humanity." Rather, we live life "according to Spirit," who empowers us to live as we ought: "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses" (2 Cor 10:3-4).

The Christian is no longer under "the law of sin" (Rom 8:2)—unlike the Jew under the law, who is a "prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members" (Rom 7:23). The difference between the person in Romans 7 and the Christian is between *willingness* to obey God's will and *doing* God's will and pleasing God (cf. Rom 7:25 with Rom 8:5-7). The Christian recognizes the profound, daily struggle with sin, idolatry and self-centeredness. But—like a newly adopted child—those in Christ take on a new family identity and status; in the Messiah we have become children of our heavenly Father who, by his Spirit, will continually shape us into the character of Christ (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18; Gal 4:19). As we engage in daily habits of obedience, service, trust and love, the character of Christian individuals and communities will become increasingly like that of Christ—a topic we address in part four.

The Indicative and the Imperative: Obedience in Light of Our Status

C. S. Lewis said that God "works from the centre outwards, gradually bringing more and more of [the believer's] conduct under the new standard."[6] Changing external behavior is not God's ultimate goal for us; God is interested in internal transformation, of working out our salvation (Phil 2:12-13). Thus, for the Christian, *being* precedes *doing;* because many Christians do not know *who they are* in Christ, they can fall prey to extremes of *legalism* or *lethargy.* As Paul writes in Ephesians 4:1, "I . . . implore

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you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called"—that is, our *practice* must reflect or flow from our *position* in Christ. This is what some scholars describe as the *indicative*—the established or *accomplished fact*—and the *imperative* (or command); that is, position and practice, being and doing. In light of our *salvation* (position), we are to *work out* (practice) that salvation with fear and trembling.

It is always easier to go to a consistent extreme than to stay at the center of biblical tension. And this is particularly evident here. Earlier, we mentioned that we live in two "eras"—the *already* and the *not yet.* We experience the *already* of forgiveness, redemption, justification and adoption (Eph 1:3-12; Rom 5:1; 8:15). However, we recognize the reality of the *not yet*—that we still live in a world of sin and death, that we do yet not have immortal resurrection bodies in a new creation, that our justification and adoption are not fully finalized (Phil 3:21; Gal 5:5; Rom 8:23). Unless we daily recognize this tension between the already and not yet, between the indicative and imperative, we will slip into the extremes of frustration or complacency.

Consider these Pauline pairings:

"For sin *shall not be master* over you" (Rom 6:14, indicative).

"*Do not let* sin *reign* in your mortal body" (Rom 6:12, imperative).

"You *became slaves* to righteousness" (Rom 6:18, indicative).

"*Present your members as slaves* to righteousness, resulting in sanctification" (Rom 6:19, imperative).

"You have been raised with Christ . . . you died" (Col 3:1-3 NIV, indicative).

"Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead" (Col 3:5, imperative).

Here we see both the accomplished *facts* (indicative) and the *commands* (imperative) that correspond to them. God has *already* given us all we need in Christ ("for in Him you have been made complete," Col 2:10). We have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ (Eph 1:4). Christ has defeated the old "power structures" and positioned us for freedom over the tyranny and fear of *death* (Rom 5), the tyranny of *sin's mastery* (Rom 6), the sin-provoking effect and defeat brought by adherence to the Mosaic

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law (Rom 7), and death produced by the flesh or our this-worldly orientation "in Adam" (Rom 8). The new era "in Christ" is characterized by *life* (Rom 5), by *righteousness* (Rom 6), by Christ's *fulfillment* of the Mosaic law, and by the *Spirit* who brings *life* (Rom 8).[7]

But we have *not yet* completed the race, and Christ's image continues to be formed in us as we daily love and trust in Christ and obey his commands. So, in light of this position or status God has granted us, we are commanded to live up to what we are: "Don't go back to what you were. You don't have to live like a slave to sin anymore."

Overemphasizing the "already" side, the Corinthians so focused on their *position* in Christ, living in the "already," that they ignored the "not yet." Some even denied there was a future resurrection (1 Cor 15:12). They took pride in their "power," "wisdom," "knowledge," and "spirituality" (1:18–2:16; 3:18-20; 2:10–3:4). Since they had God's Spirit and an amazing array of spiritual gifts, "their physical conduct [seemed] to them a matter of indifference."[8] They assumed immoral living—and tolerated it; they believed this didn't affect God's assessment of them (cf. 1 Cor 5:1-8). They had arrived! So Paul sarcastically wrote to them: "You are already filled, you have already become rich, you have become kings without us; and indeed, I wish that you had become kings so that we also might reign with you" (1 Cor 4:8). For such, Paul gives warnings against spiritual pride, mentions divine judgment (1 Cor 3:13-15; 4:5; 11:30) and exhorts them regarding ongoing obedience and humility (1 Cor 1:18-31; 5:6; 15:31). Overemphasizing the indicative needs to be corrected by attending to the imperative.

By contrast, the Galatians were stuck in the mentality of the *not yet*—living by the imperative of doing, performing and "adding" to Christ's sufficiency. Such a lifestyle inevitably leads to frustration and defeat. The Galatians began well—in the Spirit—but they had succumbed to living by the elemental principles of this world (Gal 4:3, 9; cf. Col 2:8, 20). This bondage was similar to the "do not handle, do not taste, do not touch" regulations of the Colossians (Col 2:21). They had slipped into performance mode, living according to the "elementary things" devised by humans, and had forgotten the great things of the gospel. This congregation needed to be reminded of their position and completeness "in Christ."

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Obedience Versus Legalism

Paul affirmed that the Mosaic law is good (Rom 7:12), the law is spiritual (Rom 7:14), and there are "greater" and "lesser" commandments (Mt 5:17-19). The law is only good if it is used lawfully, as it was intended (1 Tim 1:8). How is it possible to misuse the law? How can the law be used illegally or unlawfully? Of course, the antinomian who opposes all laws and standards obviously misuses the law. But the legalist misuses the law in a different way. And there is the middle ground of character formation or the cultivation of virtue, by which doing God's will becomes more automatic.

The first problem with various forms of legalism is the false assumption that *obedience to the law is a means of salvation or status before God.* Paul's letter to the "bewitched" Galatians opposes "another gospel"—the message the Judaizers proclaimed—that right standing before God can somehow be achieved by (presumptuously) "adding" to Jesus' sufficiency by adopting Jewish "boundary markers" such as circumcision and kosher laws in order to be properly identified as God's people. Elsewhere, Paul refers to the teachings of false prophets prohibiting certain foods and sex in marriage as "doctrines of demons" (1 Tim 4:1-5). Ironically, what these teachers banned were actually good gifts from God to enjoy and receive with thanks. The point seems to be that the further one moves away from grace and into legalism, the more demonic this way of life becomes.

Even if a person claims to be saved by grace, she can display these easily-exhibited marks of piety for show (e.g., fasting, giving and praying in Mt 6:1-18). Jesus condemns such displays of glory-seeking, advocating instead doing such acts secretly and anonymously so that God alone can see and reward. Such spiritual exhibitionism is the opposite of the way of faith: "How can you believe, who receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?" (Jn 5:44 RSV). On the other hand, we may at other times be tempted to shrink from doing what is good or being slipshod in our devotion. In this case, Jesus admonishes us, "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Mt 5:16). As one theologian summarizes things: *Show when tempted to hide* (e.g., Mt 5:13-16), and *hide when tempted to show* (Mt 6:1).[9]

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Another legalistic danger is *obedience through self-effort* rather than relying on the Spirit and the grace of God. Here, the Western church is in constant danger of operating by technique, method and programming rather than in reliance on the Spirit to produce lasting, spiritual fruit. As we saw above, Paul worked harder than all the apostles, but he did so relying on God's strength (1 Cor 15:10; Col 1:29). As the singer Keith Green urged, "Keep doing your best, and pray that it's blessed . . . and He'll take care of the rest."

A fourth problem with legalism is that it *denies Christ's sufficiency* in that *we must somehow bear the burden of guilt that the Savior has already borne.* God "is faithful and just," not just merciful and kind (1 Jn 1:9). If the Father did not forgive our sins, he would be unfaithful and unjust, for he would be demanding of us a second payment for what has already been paid. "Oh, what needless pain we bear," said the hymn writer.

A fifth problem with legalism is its emphasis on *rule following rather than the formation of Christlike character.* The philosopher Immanuel Kant stressed doing one's moral duty and following rules or maxims that can be universalized by all people—"don't lie, steal or cheat." However, he bypassed the importance of virtuous character from which these acts should flow. That is, we increasingly do what is right, kind and loving because it flows from daily habits of love, service and self-discipline cultivated over time. Merely following rules is not enough. Although rules are not unimportant, our good deeds and edifying words should spring from more fully developed Christlike character (Mt 7:16-20; Jas 3:13).

Finally, another type of legalism is *obedience out of fear of negative consequences rather than out of love* (1 Jn 4:18). Though obedience for lesser motives is not necessarily sinful and, therefore, not legalism in the same way, it nevertheless reflects an immaturity in relationships. Obeying the law out of fear of the consequences is pragmatic and *extrinsic;* obeying from love for our Savior and master is the higher, *intrinsic* obedience. It is like getting a college education because your parents required you to (or maybe so that you can find a job) as opposed to going to school because you love to learn and use your mind. To be sure, *it is better to do the right thing for the wrong reason than not to do the right thing at all.* It is better to be legalistic in one's

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obedience than to disobey God. And while God appeals to his people to obey both from a hope of reward and a fear of loss *as a last resort* (Ezek 3:17-21; 33:7-9; Dan 12:3; 1 Cor 3:10-15), the highest motive is love and devotion. Obedience out of gratitude for all the gifts of grace is the best antidote to the virus of legalism.

Misunderstandings Concerning Legalism and Obedience

Samuel told King Saul, "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Sam 15:22). Jesus affirmed this very point: "I desire compassion, and not sacrifice" (Mt 9:13; 12:7; cf. Hos 6:6). Like Jesus, we must oppose the legalism that strains out a gnat and swallows a camel (Mt 23:4). Yet so many misunderstand what kind of legalism needs to be opposed!

First, *opposing legalism does not mean opposing all laws.* A simple perusal of Psalm 119 makes this abundantly clear: "O how I love Your law!" (Ps 119:97). And, John reminds us, God's "commands" are not burdensome (1 Jn 5:3).

Second, *we must avoid a faulty understanding of "the spirit of the law."* Two passages in the New Testament contrast the letter and spirit—Romans 7:6 and 2 Corinthians 3:6. "The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Cor 3:6 NIV). In both cases Paul uses "letter" as a synonym for law—the law that shuts us up to condemnation—and "Spirit," the Holy Spirit who gives life. Now, following the "spirit of the law" may, for some, be a cover for a relativistic or situational ethic—that being well-meaning or nice or having decent intentions is all that matters. No, Christ's desire for mercy or compassion instead of religious externals doesn't diminish the duties of discipleship: to deny self and take up our cross, to love Christ more than family, to surrender to the ultimate demands of Christ's kingdom, even if it means persecution and martyrdom.

Third, *opposing legalism is not to advocate unbridled freedom.* In the Bible freedom is not license to do what we please, but power to do what we ought (Gal 5:1, 13). And as we are transformed into Christ's character through daily habits and disciplines cultivated over time, loving and obeying God's will increasingly become second nature. We become more authentically human and freer in our love for God and others. Absolute freedom, however, is an

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illusion. All we are really offered in human existence is the choice of masters: sin or righteousness, Satan or God. We will inescapably worship and serve either God or some cheap God-substitute. As C. S. Lewis said, in the end there are two kinds of people: those who say to God "Thy will be done" and those to whom *God* says, "Thy will be done."[10]

Fourth, *legalism cannot be reduced to following human-made rules.* There are human-made rules that have been devised for our protection: we should drive on correct side of the road, obey traffic signals, vacate a building when a fire alarm sounds. Paul admonishes citizens to submit to their rulers who have a responsibility to protect citizens, preserve peace and execute justice (cf. Rom 13; 1 Pet 2:18), but they are themselves subject to a higher Authority. This is why "we must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). That said, even inadequate human government is better than no government at all; order is better than chaos.

Fifth, *legalism should not be equated with adhering to negative or "nit-picky" rules.* True, the Christian faith is not simply a list of dos and don'ts, and God is more concerned about our becoming Christlike and living wisely than being rule-oriented. However, dos and don'ts *are* found throughout Genesis to Revelation—including Paul's cautions about hairstyles and dress that show off one's social status. As we've seen, God's rules or commands are not to be confused with legalism (Rom 8:2; Gal 6:2, 16; 1 Tim 3:2; Rom 8:2). Even when Jesus rebukes religious leaders in Matthew 23, he is not opposed to their meticulousness in tithing mint, dill, and cumin, but their hypocrisy. They neglected the "weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith" (Mt 23:23-24 RSV). They didn't practice what they preached (Mt 23:3).

Unfortunately, this problem of hypocrisy is one of the top reasons the unchurched are turned off to the Christian faith.[11] In the West, there are many negative associations with the term *Christian.* In fact, it may be wise to first discern what people understand by the word *Christian* before we use it. The popular writer Donald Miller, though we would disagree with him at points, is spot on in this illustration:

> In a recent radio interview I was sternly asked by the host, who did not consider himself a Christian, to defend Christianity. I told him that I

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> couldn't do it, and moreover, that I didn't want to defend the term. He asked me if I was a Christian and I told him yes. "Then why don't you want to defend Christianity?" he asked, confused. I told him I no longer knew what the term meant. Of the hundreds of thousands of people listening to his show that day, some of them had terrible experiences with Christianity, they may have been yelled at by a teacher in a Christian school, abused by a minister, or browbeaten by a Christian parent. To them, the term *Christianity* meant something that no Christian I know would defend. By fortifying the term, I am only making them more and more angry. I won't do it. . . . I told the radio show host that I would rather talk about Jesus and how I came to believe that Jesus exists and that he likes me. The host looked back at me with tears in his eyes. When we were done, he asked me if we could go get lunch together. He told me how much he didn't like Christianity but how he had always wanted to believe Jesus was the Son of God.[12]

Summary

We have already seen that obedience to God's/Christ's commands and standards is not opposed to *love;* rather, obedience is a *reflection* of our love for God/Christ (Jn 14:15; 15:10; 1 Jn 2:3). Nor is obedience to God's laws opposed to *faith* but rather an expression or outworking of our trust in God (Eph 2:8-10); indeed, faith is the only way to respond to grace—not *doing* to earn God's acceptance but accepting what God has *done* for us in Christ. Nor is law opposed to *grace,* but rather God's commands are for our well-being: "for our good always and for our survival" (Deut 6:24; cf. 10:13). God's laws are a *gracious* gift to us to guide us as the people of God (Ex 20:1-2; Jn 1:17). Yet Christ's disciples must go beyond *rule following* to the transformation of our character so that obedience becomes increasingly second nature (see part four).

Contrary to the Judaizers, the Mosaic law could not save or bring reconciliation with God; rather it was faith in the God who promises (Gen 15:6)—a theme Paul hammers home in Romans and Galatians. And contrary to the antinomians, divine laws and commands are expressions of God's love and grace, and they are bound up with a life of faith and discipleship.

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Professing Christians who are opposed to any laws at all are misguided and are misreading the Scriptures. Indeed, we would expect Christ and the apostles refer to *some* Mosaic laws as binding for Christians—indeed, for all human beings. Of course, Jesus and the apostles do not endorse *all* of these laws for the new covenant community to follow. For example, Jesus himself declared all foods to be clean (Mk 7:19), and the book of Hebrews makes clear that animal sacrifices, the priesthood, the tabernacle (and temple, by implication) are a shadow of what is to be found in Christ. Beyond this, we would expect that the "weightier matters of the law" (Mt 23:23) would be taken up and applied for the new covenant community by Christ and the apostles. The Old Testament, with its laws and instructions, has been filtered through the sieve of later revelation—namely, the teaching of Christ and the apostles, and this "law of Christ" is our authoritative guide for faith and life.

The law of Moses is no longer the new covenant believer's *direct* and *immediate* source of guidance.[13] Jesus affirmed the authority of the divinely revealed Mosaic law, but he declared that it was fulfilled and embodied in him; thus its *function* for the Christian is not what it was for ancient Israel. In the words of N. T. Wright, "the Torah is given for a specific period of time, and is then set aside—not because it was a bad thing now happily abolished, but because it was a good thing whose purpose had now been accomplished."[14]

While Christ embodies and makes clear the full significance of "the Law and the Prophets," he and the New Testament writers express an important moral continuity with the Hebrew Scriptures. The Ten Commandments serve as a moral core—a summary—of the Mosaic law set forth in both Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 6. As we shall see, nine of these ten commandments are repeated in various ways in the New Testament, though there is admittedly dispute regarding the enduring relevance of the Sabbath command for believers today (see chapter thirteen).

Most of this book will involve unpacking the enduring beauty, value and implications of these commands. God, we've seen, is more concerned with *character* than *commands,* more concerned with *love* than *law.* But, in actuality, God's law is a spelling out of how love will behave. That's why we have

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begun our study with "love" and "law." And as we examine the Ten Commandments, we will understand more clearly what God is like and how he has designed us as to live—as his "chosen race," "royal priesthood" and "holy nation" so that we may proclaim by our lips and our lives "the excellencies of Him who has called [us] out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Pet 2:9).

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PART III

SIN

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5

Sin

Its Definition and Its Origin

Sin is an unpopular word, but a very popular activity. Thought lightly of on earth by those who practice it, sin is considered the heaviest of all weights in heaven—whose penalty was borne by the Son of God, who came into the world to save sinners (1 Tim 1:15; cf. Mt 1:21).

In nineteenth-century America, ideas of human nature and solutions to human problems were generally informed by the Bible and defined as sin. But under the tutelage of the social sciences, especially psychology, the concept of what is wrong with humans has evolved from *sin* to *error* to *illness* to *hurt* so that far from feeling guilty, the predominant notion is that anyone with problems is a victim of someone else's malice, avarice or stupidity. In our therapeutic age, we have diagnoses or labels for what Scripture bluntly calls "sin." "Road rage" requires relaxation techniques or "anger management" classes—not repentance, prayer and other spiritual disciplines. Alcoholism is called a disease or sickness. All of our human problems are defined in *nonmoral* and *non-theological* terms. Any pathology is reduced to psychological disorders that must be resolved by therapeutic methods.[1] In Wayne Oates's words, "Rage, fear, bondage, shame, guilt, worthlessness, and many others—which are abundant in the psalms and the letters of Paul especially—are labeled with psychological terms."[2]

So the nature of sin is little understood, the origin of it little known, and the results of it considered only too late. Yet sin is a major theme of Scripture, and without understanding it, the greater themes of right-

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eousness, repentance and salvation can never be rightly known. Let us consider what the Word of God teaches concerning the nature of sin, its roots and fruits.

Definition of Sin

As the story goes, *The Times* of London posed a question for its readers: "What's wrong with the world?" And the Christian writer G. K. Chesterton offered a simple and profound answer: "I am." At very minimum, the concept of sin expresses that something is wrong with the world. Of course, there is much wrong in the world that is not moral. There is something wrong with rust on our car fenders—as with bank failure, the weakness of old age or a flooded basement. Nor do we hold anyone guilty for innocent mistakes. After all, such are the troubles and grief that come with our earthly condition. By contrast, sin has a *moral* component—the territory of *right and wrong, duty and prohibition, good and evil.*

While the concept of sin has a *moral* dimension to it, it is also *religious* or *theological.* It is not merely breaking a law or not doing our duty. Unlike "wrong," "evil," "badness" or even "crime," *sin* introduces the idea of *God.* Sin is a departure from the character and will of God—a deviation from the way things ought to be. *Shalom* ("peace") in the Old Testament represents life that is well-ordered, whole, flourishing, right with God and others. By contrast, sin is anti-*shalom.* It is "culpable shalom-breaking."[3]

Sin is properly understood in a *religious* context; it is connected to the righteous character of God and his will for creatures made in his moral likeness. But how did sin come about in the first place? How could sin and evil emerge in a "very good" world?

The Origin of Sin

God and sin. James emphatically states that evil does not originate with God (Jas 1:13-17) but with fallen creatures. Yet, citing the King James Version, some claim that the sovereign God somehow must be the author or cause of evil: "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things" (Is 45:7). And again, "Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the LORD commandeth it not?

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Out of the mouth of the most High proceedeth not evil and good?" (Lam 3:37-38; cf. Amos 3:6 and Prov 16:4 KJV). Confusion is removed by noting that the Hebrew word for "evil" or "wickedness" (*ra'*) is better translated "trouble," "disaster" or "calamity" in these passages. The word *ra'* is something of a catch-all term for what is negative.

What of a verse like Proverbs 16:4—that God makes the wicked for the day of doom? Tremper Longman notes that this verse is best understood along the lines of Genesis 50:20: "You meant evil against me; God meant it for good." We see this in the New Testament, where God is able to use evil free human choices (Pilate's and the Jewish leaders') to bring about good ends, such as redemption through Jesus' death (Acts 2:22-24). Writes Longman:

> God uses all things for his good purposes, even evil people and their wicked acts. . . . The verse [in Proverbs] is not a statement that God authors evil. The teaching of the verse fits well with the general biblical idea that humans author their own wickedness. It is a statement of God's control. God can use the very act of human rebellion and autonomy for his purposes.[4]

In all things—including evil ones—God is able to work for the good of those who love him (Rom 8:28).

What of a passage like 1 Kings 22:22, where God sends "lying spirits" to Ahab, allowing him to be deceived? This act should be recognized as divine *permission* for continued deception. It turns out that Ahab was already *self*-deceived, for which he was fully culpable. God's activity was not the *instigation* of lying. We see the same phenomenon in 2 Thessalonians 2:9-11, where God sends a "strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false" (ESV). However, this passage is preceded by Paul's mentioning that "they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved." *Human* opposition to the truth—a resistance to God's initiating grace ("so as to be saved")—led to a further *divinely* sent delusion.

Such an act is akin to God's hardening human hearts or blinding eyes in response to human self-hardening or self-blinding. In John 12:37-38, Jesus' opponents do not believe through Jesus' signs because God had blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts. Immediately preceding this passage

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(Jn 12:35-36), we see human *self*-hardening in the face of Christ's gracious invitation and initiative: "For a little while longer the Light is among you. Walk while you have the Light, so that darkness will not overtake you; he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes. While you have the Light, believe in the Light, so that you may become sons of Light." Jesus has *already* admonished those who are self-hardened to move toward the Light while they have it. This *self*-hardening, if persisted in, may lead to *divine* hardening—namely, God's withdrawal of particular graces, giving people over to the stubbornness of their hearts if he so chooses (Rom 9:15). We see this in Psalm 81:10, where God invites his people, "Open your mouth wide and I will fill it." Tragically, the Israelites "did not listen to My voice" or "obey Me." After this self-hardening, a divine hardening can come: "So I gave them over to the stubbornness of their heart" so that they might "walk in their own devices" (Ps 81:11-12). Just as God does not harden soft—or potentially soft—hearts, neither does he send deceiving spirits to those who aren't already self-deceived.

Now, we recognize that such passages are much discussed—sometimes very heatedly—in certain theological circles. But we are attempting to make the best overall sense of these passages, including a clear separation of God from evil, as James 1 emphasizes.

So, God is no more the literal cause or "creator" of evil than certain Old Testament figures like Jeroboam, son of Nebat, who "caused Israel to sin" (1 Kings 22:52; cf. Num 31:16; 2 Chron 21:11-14; Neh 13:26). The devil, not God, is the beginning of sin—a "murderer from the beginning . . . and the 'father of lies'" (Jn 8:44). The God and Creator of free moral agents is no more the author of sin than the Wright brothers are the authors of airplane crashes.

The origin of creaturely sin. If God is not the author of sin, how did evil or sin originate in a "very good" world? The Canons of Dordt rightly assert that the "cause or blame for the unbelief, as well as all other sins, is not at all in God, but in man" (1.5)—and, before him, Satan and his co-rebels, who "abandoned their proper abode" (Jude 6). We are told precious little about how Satan and his hosts turned away from their first estate. Indeed, many biblical scholars point out that passages such as Isaiah 14 (the king of Babylon) and Ezekiel 28 (the king of Tyre) utilize exaggerated language

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to refer not to Satan, but to historic kings who sought to exalt themselves despite the position of privilege God had given to them.

We can draw a few biblical strands together to offer a basic explanation of sin's origins in a good world.[5]

First, *sin is a defect rather than a thing in itself; sin or evil is not created by God.* Sin or evil is a kind of absence of what ought to be there; it is a corruption of God's originally good creation. It's like a pothole in a road: the pothole is the absence of road that ought to be there. Likewise, our first ancestors were created good—*without* moral defect. But their choice to disobey was the result of misusing the good gift of creaturely freedom.

Second, *the first sin was voluntary.* This first sin originated with moral creatures and could have been freely resisted; nothing about their divinely created nature *compelled* them to sin. If their nature required them to sin, then they would have done as they ought. But that couldn't be since God would have been blameworthy for an intrinsically flawed creation; no, God brought about a "very good" one (Gen 1:31). By the free will's action, a radical, new occurrence broke into God's good created order.

Third, *the first sin was a turning away from God—the greatest Good—to creaturely, lesser goods.* Why turn away from an all-good, loving Creator in a perfect environment? In refusing to listen to God's word but rather a stranger's in the Garden, our first ancestors turned away from the Creator, the ultimate, unchangeable Good toward changeable, finite goods, as Augustine said. That is, certain angels and the first humans sinned when they voluntarily directed their affections *toward* the creaturely and *away from* God—a misdirected, disordered love. Humans became captivated by and fixated on one particular fruit tree God made. Sadly, they sinned because they came to believe that lesser, finite goods could produce that supremely ultimate and most desirable state of affairs—one that only God could bring about. What happened is that creatures came to be captured by lesser, created beauties rather than fixing their eyes on God's uncreated beauty.

So the first sin consisted in *a failure to pay attention to the reasons for loving God supremely and regarding him as the highest Good.* Adam and Eve were not simply irrational or weak-willed, nor were they simply misguided or mistaken in their thinking. Otherwise, they might be excused. Rather,

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they failed to attend to the clear reasons that they should have loved and trusted God. When they did think of God, they focused on his prohibition and his threat of death rather than his goodness (Gen 3:3; cf. Gen 2:17) and even went beyond God's explicit command by highlighting the fruit's untouchability—something God *hadn't* mentioned (Gen 3:3). Eve came to be fixated on God's good creation as more alluring than God—that it was "good for food . . . a delight to the eyes, and . . . desirable to make one wise" (Gen 3:6).

Finally, we tentatively suggest that *the first sin may not have been a sudden turning away from God but may have been more of a process.* Indeed, Old Testament scholars recognize that we have much condensed material in the early chapters of Genesis, and it seems that orthodox belief allows for us to see a *telescoping* of events that unfolded more gradually. As we saw, Eve's exaggerated addition—"or touch it"—to God's original prohibition gives a hint of something more gradual, and that there may have been a creeping separation between creatures and God that climaxed in an intentional, thought-out choice to turn away from God.

In the end, Adam and Eve *failed to focus on the most crucial reasons* (which is a defect) and *volitionally acted* (an effect of the failure). *Both* of these choices, though foreknown by God, were up to our first parents, who could have chosen otherwise. Their sinful choice was free, culpable and avoidable—not necessary.

While we are not trying to remove all mystery regarding the origins of sin, we believe our account makes good sense of the Scriptures and preserves appropriate theological and moral distance between a perfectly good Creator and evil.

We will explore further dimensions and nuances of the "mystery of lawlessness" (2 Thess 2:7) in the next chapter.

Further Reading

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6

Sin

Its Descriptions and Its Results

The Scriptures devote much attention to sin in all of its ugly variety. Sin has the effect of separating us from God (Is 59:1-2), and it is because of sin that Christ came into the world to rescue us (Mt 1:21; 1 Tim 1:15). Thankfully, sin is not the final word! But to better understand our salvation as well as the challenges of the Christian life, we should understand the nature of sin as well its results.

Descriptions of Sin

Sin as transgression. Sin is transgression against God's law. In fact, where there is no law, there is no sin (Rom 7:7). Sin can be volitional, a deliberate choice—and usually it is. The rebel deliberately violates the law. The sinner who knows to do right, but doesn't do it, sins (Jas 4:17).

But sin is not the violation of just any law—laws of logic, laws of parents, laws of state. Sin is against the law of *God.* In fact, to violate the law of God is to violate God's very character. The great problem is vertical, and from a wrong vertical relationship flow all the horizontal wrongs (Gen 39:9; Ps 51:4; 1 Thess 4:8). When David said, "Against You, You only, I have sinned" (Ps 51:4), he did not mean that he had *not* sinned grievously against Uriah and Bathsheba and, indeed, the whole nation. Rather, these responsibilities to fellow human beings pale in comparison to violating God's character and commands. Not only is God's character violated, but sin *wounds* God too: "How I have been hurt by their adulterous hearts which turned

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away from Me" (Ezek 6:9). Sin grieves God's Spirit (Eph 4:30).

Some may ask, "Why can't God simply forgive? Isn't that his job?" Such a question, however, ignores not only the just *character* of God, but also the personal *responsibility* of humans, as well as the *gravity* of sin. Should God ignore the violation of his character? And should God forgive even when people aren't repentant? The issue isn't why God finds it *difficult* to forgive, but how he finds it *possible* to do so at all.[1]

Sin is ultimately an expression of idolatry—the creation of a God substitute and a denial of God's sovereignty. Transgressing against God's ways is an assertion of self-sovereignty. Sin can be both volitional and unintentional. The Scripture itself refers to intentional and unintentional sins (Num 15:22-31), and both fit the category of "transgression."

The Bible, however, does not restrict sin to *transgression* against God's character and will. Sin also includes falling short of the moral and spiritual mark.

Sin as falling short. The primary word for sin in the Old Testament *(ḥāṭā')* means "miss the mark"—a word used of missing a target or losing one's way, as well as the moral meaning of missing God's standard of behavior or losing one's way spiritually. The translators of the Old Testament chose a word in Greek that had the same basic meaning (verb *hamartanō;* noun *hamartia).* In the New Testament, the singular "sin" can be used to describe an embedded condition, a state of alienation or a dominating power—not simply specific individual violations or wrongdoing.

Greek philosophers such as Aristotle did not have a view of sin or depravity. For Plato, to truly *know* what is good inevitably leads to *doing* good. Any failure is due to ignorance. By contrast, Scripture points out that people can *know* full well what they ought to do but sin anyway (Jas 4:17). The biblical concept of a flawed inner state includes a sinful *condition,* sinful *thoughts* and sins of *omission.*

Sin as a Condition

Before I (Paul) went on staff with a church in Schenectady, New York, in the late 1980s, Dr. Herbert Mekeel, a noted evangelical leader, had had a long tenure as pastor of this church. As the story goes, when he would see couples in his congregation with a newborn child, this bachelor pastor

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would wryly comment, "Another sinner has been born into the world!" In a similar spirit, my late father-in-law would occasionally pause after the family Bible reading to repeat—with a slight smile—what he had heard growing up in Holland: "Let that sink into your dark, black hearts."

Most people believe that we become sinners if and when we commit sinful acts. The Bible puts it the other way around. The Bible teaches that humans come into the world as sinners (Eph 2:3) and that we sin because we are sinners. According to Scripture, the root problem is not a poor environment, and sin is certainly not the responsibility of another person such as a parent: "The soul who sins will die" (Ezek 18:4). The human heart is, from birth, inclined to evil. This is not the whole story, of course. This does not mean that a person is incapable of doing anything good (Acts 10:31). Furthermore, our fallenness in Adam is only "part one" of the story; there is a larger, continuing narrative, in which God invites human beings to join in the new humanity of the second Adam, Jesus Christ.

Our nature as God created it is good—rationality, creativity, moral responsibility, conscience, volition. But what God has created has been damaged in every facet of our being; ours is a *marred beauty.* Thus even before a person chooses deliberately to transgress a specific commandment, his condition itself is damaged and tainted. The human heart is "evil" (Heb 3:12)—"deceitful" and "desperately sick" (Jer 17:9).

Theologian Langdon Gilkey, once imprisoned in a Japanese prison camp during World War II, wrote about these experiences in his book, *Shantung Compound:*

> Such experiences with ordinary human cussedness naturally stimulated me to do a good deal of thinking in such time as I had to myself. My ideas as to what people were like and as to what motivated their actions were undergoing a radical revision. People generally—and I know I could not exclude myself—seemed to be much less rational and much more selfish than I had ever guessed, not at all the "nice folk" I had always thought them to be. They did not decide to do things because it would be reasonable and moral to act in that way, but because that course of action suited their self-interest. Afterward they would find rational and moral reasons for what they had already determined to do.[2]

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This illustrates what Paul emphasizes in Romans—that the sinful human heart is the root of our miserable condition—not mere sinful acts. This leads to several related considerations, such as "flesh" and "Spirit," original sin and the issue of Pelagianism.

Flesh and Spirit. Although we touched on the matter of *flesh* and *Spirit* in part two ("Law"), we should add a point of clarification here on the sometimes confusing phrase "sinful nature." The New International Version uses the term "sinful nature" for the term "flesh" (*sarx*) in certain places in Romans and Galatians. According to Romans 8:9, believers are *not* "in the flesh" but—in the new realm in which believers dwell through Christ—"in the Spirit." That is, when we were "in Adam" (1 Cor 15:22), "natural" (1 Cor 2:14) and alienated from God, we were "in the flesh." But now we are "in Christ" and therefore "in the Spirit" or "spiritual."[3] Those who are "in Christ" have "crucified the flesh" (Gal 5:24). Yes, we Christians still struggle with sin (1 Jn 2:1-2), but the language of Scripture indicates that we who are redeemed have God's Spirit—the defining mark of belonging to the new covenant era. Though the battle against sin will not end while we live in this fallen world, we live in a new realm—"in Christ," the second Adam—and no longer "in the flesh" because we have God's Spirit.

Original sin: Inherited guilt or damage? G. K. Chesterton famously observed: "Certain new theologians dispute original sin, which is the only part of Christian theology which can really be proved."[4] Indeed, the "ancient masters of religion" began with the fact of sin—"a fact as practical as potatoes."[5]

Earlier we discussed the *origin* of sin, but how did this primal sin affect Adam's descendants—what theologians call "original sin"? Romans 5:12 is a key text here: "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because [*eph' hō*] all sinned." Augustine, following the Latin (*in quo:* "in whom [all sinned]"), concluded that Adam's guilt was imputed to all humanity.

So we have divided opinion on the *exact* connection between Adam and his descendants. Some theologians take what we could call the "inherited guilt" view—that Adam's sin was *imputed* to his ancestors and that we too share the blame for that primeval sin—that we were somehow "with Adam"

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when he sinned. Another view is the "consequences" or "damage" view. This view emphasizes that extensive damage has come to the human race through our original parents, just as negative consequences come to babies born to drug addicts because of their parents' actions. This includes alienation from God, alienation from one another, alienation from creation and alienation within our own selves. In addition, a sinful tendency comes to us all—although many theologians argue that this damage itself does not condemn, say, the severely mentally handicapped or those who die in infancy; they cannot act as morally responsible agents.

Theologian James Leo Garrett notes the *consensus* about the *lack* of consensus among orthodox theologians: "To affirm the reality of sin is easy and to affirm the universality of depravity is not difficult, but to settle on the relationship of the sin of Adam and Eve to our sin is indeed difficult."[6] Biblical scholar Douglas Moo wisely observes: "Perhaps, indeed, Paul has not provided us with enough data to make a definite decision; and we should probably be content with the conclusion that Paul affirms the reality of a solidarity of all humanity with Adam in his sin without being able to explain the exact nature of that union."[7] Whatever view one takes, our condition is a miserable one indeed and requires divine assistance.

Three views of sin. In the history of the church, three views of sin have been categorized. The *orthodox* view sees human beings born into a sinful condition through Adam. What is debated is whether they inherit Adam's guilt or simply experience the damage wrought through Adam, including a sinful disposition. In either case, God must initiate salvation through his Spirit, without whom no one would turn to God. Under the orthodox view, there is, first, the *synergistic* view, which emphasizes that God's initiative requires human response and cooperation—that humans, freed in their wills, must receive rather than resist the divine gift of salvation. The second orthodox view is the *monergistic* view, which states that God irresistibly bestows salvation without human cooperation.

On the other end of the spectrum is the heretical *Pelagian* view, named after the British monk Pelagius (b. 350), whose view diminished the depth of sin and was unjustifiably optimistic about the human condition. According to A. H. Strong, Pelagianism espouses the following:

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> 1) That law can command only volitions. 2) That states of the soul can be commanded only insofar as they are the direct effect of previous volitions. 3) Hence sin consists simply in acts of volition. 4) That whatever a man has not plenary ability to do he is under no obligation to do. 5) That there is no such thing, therefore, as innate depravity.[8]

Between orthodoxy and Pelagianism is *semi-Pelagianism,* which affirms that unaided human nature can take the first earnest step toward God, and then God responds to this display of human good will. This view, espoused by John Cassian of Marseilles (A.D. 360–432), was condemned at the Synod of Orange (in France) in 529. Why? This view fails to take seriously human fallenness and the need for God's initiating grace, without which no one would seek after God (Rom 3:9-18).

Sin in Thought

Many believe that people sin only if they commit sinful acts, but the Bible teaches that the inner thoughts can be sinful as well (Mt 5:28; 15:18-19). Hatred is not wrong merely because it may lead to murderous acts. Hatred itself is sin. Or two persons may perform an identical act—visiting an elderly relative in a nursing home, for example; but one's motives may be loving while the other's is immoral (e.g., visiting because one wants to be included in grandmother's will). Failure to conform to God's character and will is not merely external but also internal: thoughts, motives and attitudes, as private as they are, can fall short of the glory of God. The underlying contention of biblical ethics is that every lack of conformity to God is sinful and wicked. This includes both lack of conformity in action and in motive and affection.[9]

Sins of Omission

Many Christian prayer books have this confession: "We have left undone those things which we ought to have done." We all fall short of God's glorious character by failing to do what we ought: "Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin" (Jas 4:17 RSV). Consider the slave who buried his master's money in the ground and squandered opportunity by doing nothing with what had been entrusted to him (Mt 25:14-30).

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We *fail* to love God supremely and our neighbor as ourselves—sometimes out of ignorance and neglect, for which particular offerings were prescribed in the Old Testament (Lev 5:5-6). The Anglican Book of Common Prayer (1945) contains the confession "there is no health in us" and the request, "O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders." Although it is actually a sign of *health* to recognize we are sick, the confession reminds us of our profoundly damaged condition, which expresses itself in sins of omission.

Other Aspects of Sin

The unpardonable sin. Universalism is the doctrine that all will be saved or spiritually liberated; "Christian universalism" affirms that all humans will eventually be saved through Christ in particular.[10]

A key text that undermines universalism and highlights God's uncompromising justice is Jesus' reference to an *unpardonable* sin (Mt 12:31-32). Also, John mentions a "sin leading to death" (1 Jn 5:16-17). Jesus says that this sin "shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come." Now, theologians do not agree on what this sin is because neither Christ nor John explained their statements. John's less troublesome statement seems to refer to physical death; final damnation is not obviously in view. Christ's warning, however, does speak of this, and this passage frightens many sincere Christians: "Have I committed the unpardonable sin?" Or they may use the similar-sounding language of Hebrews: "Have I done something that makes it impossible for me to be brought back to repentance?" (cf. Heb 6:6; 10:29).

Rather than wondering whether a damnable word mistakenly spoken or an inadvertent act is the unpardonable sin, we should remember the context in Matthew 12: Jesus' hardened opponents had so reversed light and darkness so as to ascribe the work of Christ by the Spirit to the power of demons. When people reach such a point of no moral or spiritual return, they will not be wondering if they have committed this unforgivable sin. This is comparable to the apostate in Hebrews who is disdainful toward the salvation of God and "has trampled under foot the Son of God," "regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant," and "insulted the Spirit of grace" (Heb 10:29).

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Ultimately, resisting the call of the Spirit to the end of one's life can never be forgiven. But the one who truly repents can find forgiveness, as this is the clear teaching of Scripture. Though we may not dogmatize about the specific nature of the sin, it certainly is sin against the Holy Spirit, and it certainly results in a permanent state of alienation from God. Perhaps the only statement that can be made with assurance is that there is a self-induced state of mind, a spirit that has so rejected the convicting work of the Holy Spirit that it is no longer salvable. The sure evidence that tormented souls have not committed the unpardonable sin is that they long for pardon.

A root sin? Is there a root sin from which all other sins grow? If our highest duty and the highest wisdom are to *love* God and others, then is the root sin a *misdirected love?* Or is the root sin *selfishness* (the pursuit of self as the supreme end), from which all evil flows, as theologian A. H. Strong believed? Or is it simply *alienation from God* and *opposition to his character and will,* as Charles Hodge maintained? Perhaps, as Augustine and Thomas Aquinas suggested, it is *pride,* which sets itself up against the knowledge of God (2 Cor 10:5)? Another possibility is *unbelief,* as the Reformers Luther and Calvin maintained.

Perhaps *idolatry,* refusing to allow God to be God in the kingdom of one's life, could be considered the sin that summarizes the other sins. John Stott wrote that the essence of sin is humanity taking the place of God whereas the essence of salvation is God taking the place of humanity. Or perhaps we should conclude that sin is so unutterably evil and so grotesquely complex that we shall never sort out all its hidden twistings and turnings. Perhaps our very disagreement serves to underscore the awful, incomprehensible nature of sin—a reminder that "there is no health in us" and that we must see sin from the viewpoint of the Great Physician in order to abhor it as we ought (Rom 12:9).

A hierarchy of sin. Many who have read Jesus' teaching about anger and lust in the Sermon on the Mount have assumed that, before God, there is no difference among sins. They conclude that all sins are equally vile and that there is no legitimate gradation in gravity or guilt-worthiness among sins. Anger and murder are equally wrong—as are lust and adultery. But

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Christ never intended to teach that the first beginning of sinful thought and its mature manifestation in action were equally heinous. That would be a terrifying notion! In actual fact, Jesus' teaching about the sinfulness of all degrees of sin would have the opposite effect: If it is as wrong to desire a woman as to take her by force, why not act on your impulses? Your guilt is not any greater. The rest of humankind would plead with the one holding such a doctrine: "If you covet my possessions, please keep it at that level and do not take them. If you hate me or fail to love me as Christ does, please keep it at that level and do not assault or kill me."

There is a biblical *hierarchy* of both virtue and sin. Love for God takes precedence over love for my neighbor. Those who sin without knowledge are to be punished on the judgment day with less severity than those who sin with knowledge (Lk 12:47-48). Teachers of Scripture and spiritual truth will be judged more severely than those who do not teach the Scriptures (Jas 3:1). In the Old Testament where specific punishments were prescribed by God, there was a gradation from capital punishment down to a slight fine, including unintentional sins as opposed to defiant sins (Num 15:22-35). There are "least commandments" (Mt 5:19) and "weightier matters" (Mt 23:23). Jewish leaders committed a "greater sin" against Jesus than Pilate (Jn 19:11). Some insults, for example, are worse than others, and to speak in wrath is worse than merely feeling it (Mt 5:22).

To hold that all sins are of equal gravity in the sight of God finds no confirmation in either the Old Testament or the New Testament. Referring back to the Sermon on the Mount, James mentions the "royal law" and the "law of liberty" (Jas 2:8, 10). This is the Golden Rule of Matthew 7:12—treat others as you would have them treat you—which is another way of saying "love your neighbor as yourself." To fail to love one's neighbor in one area—say, committing murder—is to fail in the law of love, even if one does not commit adultery (Jas 2:11). To break the law of love in one area is a violation of it all (Jas 2:10). So while we could say that all sins are equally *sin,* they are not equally *sinful.* So a ghetto child who steals a loaf of bread to feed his crippled mother is less guilty than a university professor who delights in destroying the faith of hundreds of freshmen. Yet which would be punished in the courts of our land if found guilty of such activity? Sins

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against God are lightly thought of, even by Christians, but from God's point of view they are the most worthy of judgment. We could make a similar point when it comes to virtue. For example, we have a duty to love, but those loves—God, family (biological as well as spiritual), strangers—are ordered differently (*ordo amoris*). These should not be treated equally.

To better see how God views sin, we should better understand the results of sin.

The Results of Sin

Guilt. Guilt comes immediately to mind as a consequence of sin. C. S. Lewis comments on three types of people:

> I have talked to some who felt guilt when they jolly well ought to have felt it; they have behaved like brutes and know it. I've also met others who felt guilty and weren't guilty by any standard I can apply. And thirdly, I've met people who were guilty and didn't seem to feel guilt. And isn't this what we should expect? People can be *malades imaginaires* [i.e., hypochondriacs] who are well and think they are ill; and others, especially consumptives, are ill and think they are well; and thirdly—far the largest class—people are ill and know they are ill.[11]

Sin in Scripture is almost indistinguishable from guilt (e.g., Ps 32:5).[12] As Lewis indicated, people may be guilty of violating God's standard when they may not even know of it, but Scripture brings them together.

Furthermore, guilt has two elements—namely, blameworthiness and due punishment. In the atoning death of Christ, we have not only a moral example that inspires love and self-sacrifice *within us* (Phil 2:3-8; 1 Jn 3:16). Jesus' death actually accomplished something *for us* with him being our substitute to address our guilt problem: he also died "for you" and "bore our sins in His body on the cross" (1 Pet 2:21-25; cf. Gal 2:20). The theologian Anselm attempted to explain the atonement in *Why God Became Man.* The incarnate Christ satisfied the debt humans owed God but couldn't pay. God, who alone can pay it, becomes human since humans must pay but are unable. God both *demands* the debt be paid, but also *provides satisfaction* for that debt. Anselm has a point: God is, as Paul says, "just" and the "justifier" of those who trust in him (Rom 3:26).

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Jesus is the faithful Israelite who lives out Israel's story (as the faithful Son that ethnic Israel failed to be) and bears the curse of their exile on the tree (Deut 21:23; Gal 3:13), and he is also the ultimate human as the second Adam. So Jesus' death creates a new covenant people (a new exodus) as well as a new humanity (a new creation). In his death, Christ restores and enables humans to carry out their role as God's image bearers, as priest-kings. But Jesus' death is also a cosmic achievement, in which Satan and his forces are defeated and disarmed (Jn 12:25; 16:11; Col 2:15; 1 Jn 3:8); Christ's death signals the victory over all *evil political powers* and *oppressive, dehumanizing social and religious structures.* These will all give way to God's enduring kingdom established through his agent, Jesus of Nazareth, which will be realized in the new heavens and new earth—a realm free from sin and evil. These are the lengths to which God has gone to redeem us, purify us from sin and relieve us of our guilt (Tit 2:14).

Consider this testimony of one who understood God's view of sin:

> Often . . . I have had very affecting views of my own sinfulness and vileness, very frequently to such a degree as to hold me in a kind of loud weeping, sometimes for a considerable time together, so that I have been often obliged to shut myself up. I have had a vastly greater sense of my own wickedness and the badness of my heart than ever I had before my conversion. It has often appeared to me that if God should mark iniquity against me, I should appear the very worst of all mankind, of all that have been since the beginning of the world to this time; and that I should have by far the lowest place in hell. When others that have come to talk with me about their soul's concerns have expressed the sense they have had of their wickedness, by saying that it seemed to them they were as bad as the devil himself; I thought their expressions seemed exceeding faint and feeble to represent my wickedness.[13]

What kind of degenerate criminal could honestly give such a testimony? None other than the godly theologian Jonathan Edwards, whose philosophical mind was capable of sober-minded analysis and precise expression. Edwards continues:

> My wickedness, as I am in myself, has long appeared to me perfectly ineffable and swallowing up all thought and imagination—like an infinite

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> deluge, or mountains over my head. I know not how to express better what my sins appear to me to be, than by heaping infinite on infinite and multiplying infinite by infinite. Very often for these many years, these expressions are in my mind and in my mouth: "Infinite upon infinite—infinite upon infinite!" When I look into my heart and take a view of my wickedness, it looks like an abyss infinitely deeper than hell. And it appears to me that were it not for free grace, exalted and raised up to the infinite height of all the fullness and glory of the great Jehovah, and the arm of his power and grace stretched forth in all the majesty of his power and in all the glory of his sovereignty, I should appear sunk down in my sins below hell itself, far beyond the sight of everything but the eye of sovereign grace that can pierce even down to such a depth. And yet it seems to me that my conviction of sin is exceeding small and faint; it is enough to amaze me that I have no more sense of my sin.[14]

Such is the response of one who came to understand the biblical view of sin.

As for us, perhaps we can become discouraged by observing the stark contrasts between the righteous and the wicked in the Psalms (Ps 1; 15; 112), the wise and the foolish in Proverbs (especially Prov 1–8), and the overcomers and the compromisers throughout the book of Revelation. This may suggest to the minds of many—especially those with a particularly sensitive conscience—a hopelessly unattainable sinless perfectionism and the eradication of all but the purest of motives. Yet we should remember, first, that those who have a deep knowledge of God, as Edwards, are most keenly aware of their sin. Second, these contrasts or antitheses between the righteous and unrighteous are important reminders to us about God's high standards, lest we become spiritually flabby. Third, the *biblical narratives* about heroes of the faith such as Abraham, Moses, David, Peter and many other saints helpfully remind and *encourage* us that we are all works in progress and live on this side of the fall and not in the new heavens and new earth, when we will be fully renewed.[15]

Shame. Most of us are familiar with a "guilt culture," but what about the concept of "shame" so common in non-Western cultures? The former emphasizes the legal and moral whereas the latter emphasizes the social. For

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example, in a guilt culture, if I am innocent but others believe me guilty, I will strive to have my name cleared; on the other hand, if I have done something wrong, even if no one knows it, I may be plagued by guilt feelings. In a shame culture, what others think of me dominates. If others think I am innocent (even if I have done something wrong), then there is no apparent problem. This shame-honor culture encourages the thinking that unnoticed wrongdoing is not an issue. Whereas the social response to wrongdoing in a guilt culture is to blame, accuse and punish, a shame culture focuses on ridicule, exclusion, disgrace and reproach. The remedy in a guilt culture is payment of a penalty and justification (being declared "not/no longer guilty") while in a shame culture it is opening up communication and love banishing shame.[16]

Christ's atonement addresses both guilt and shame. Roman crucifixion was intended to be a shameful, humiliating punishment of criminals and runaway slaves with the victim dying naked on a cross on a hill or at a crossroads. Jesus himself experienced the shame of the cross (cf. Heb 12:2), and he is not ashamed to identify with flesh-and-blood humans like us and to call us his brothers and sisters (Heb 2:11-14). The author of Hebrews admonishes us to identify with Christ because of the shame he bore for our sakes in his atoning death. He bore our shame so that we would not be ashamed before God—even if our identification with Christ will bring ostracism and reproach from an unbelieving world: "So, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach" (Heb 13:13).

Depravity. The doctrine of "depravity" emphasizes that none of us is as good as we should be in any facet of our humanity—whether in our conscience, will, reason, imagination, emotion or relationships. Of course, this doesn't mean that each of us is going to sink to the depths of a Hitler or a Stalin (though lest we think we stand, let us take heed to remember Stalin was once a seminary student!). No, depravity expresses the truth that *while none of is as bad as we could be, none of us is good as we should be.*

Despite the depths of depravity, it has not obliterated the human nature God created. John Calvin himself affirmed that the image of God remains despite the fall. In us all is "some residue of intelligence and judgment as well as will"; indeed, "there are still some sparks which show that he is a

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rational animal, and differs from the brutes, inasmuch as he is endued with intelligence"; he is capable of "civil order and honesty"—and we could add, the cardinal virtues of prudence, temperance, justice and fortitude (see chapter seven). To assert otherwise "is repugnant not only to the Word of God, but to common experience."[17]

Furthermore, God's "common grace" to all (as distinct from "special" or "saving" grace that is received by some) enables human beings to create culture, to organize governments, to engage in social activities and volunteer organizations, to enjoy the delights and bounty of the natural world (Acts 14:17; 17:24-25).

Addiction. Are addictions to substances such as alcohol and drugs or to behaviors such as watching pornography, playing video games and gambling more like a disease? After all, isn't an addiction like an overpowering force—a force that seems difficult or even impossible to resist and thus needs "treatment"?[18] While the word *addiction* is not strictly biblical, we do see in Scripture pictures of sinful enslavements, of being mastered by sin.

First, apart from a biblical approach to addiction, we should note that there are *degrees* of addiction. This could range from "milder" surreptitious behavior to taking even illegal risks to experience a certain "rush" or "high."

Second, it would be more accurate to speak of a "sinful habit" or "sinful obsession." Humans, though being enmeshed in sin or "enslaved" to it (Rom 6:16-22), are still morally responsible for their actions. And though it is difficult to break a longstanding habit, the habit often begins through experimental compromises, self-deception, rationalization and conscious choices, which develop into full-blown addictive behavior. The sinful obsession did not just happen, but often people "addict themselves" when they had greater power to choose than at present. Though we should show sympathy and concern for those entrenched in sinful obsessions, we should honor their humanity by treating them as moral agents rather than victims who have no choice.

Third, as with Alcoholics Anonymous, the beginning of one's turnaround is acknowledgement that one has a problem. Sometimes one's determination to break out of an addiction is jolted into reality by the shame of having been discovered—as when a porn-using father is found

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out by his teenager or when a man visiting prostitutes is arrested in a police sting operation.

Fourth, change usually takes place slowly through painful, difficult steps, and help involves multilayered support, from friend or family accountability, solidarity and honest sharing with fellow-strugglers, prayer, spiritual disciplines, and the like. This journey involves brokenness, self-humbling, unlearning old habits and learning new ones.

Theologian Cornelius Plantinga warns of simplistic categorizations of addiction: "We must reject both the typically judgmental and typically permissive accounts of the relation between sin and addiction; we must neither say that all addiction is simple sin nor that it is inculpable disease."[19] *Sin* and *addiction* could be viewed as largely, but not completely, overlapping circles. In the "quarter moons" that do not overlap, we can find examples of addictions that include little or no actual sin (e.g., a baby's chemical addiction contracted while in utero) or examples of sin that do not exhibit addictive processes (e.g., a slothful or ungrateful person, who is not necessarily addicted).

In a similar vein as Plantinga, Kent Dunnington rejects the simplistic extremes of mere disease and choice. Addiction results from a habitual behavior that becomes relatively permanent; so when provoked by a stimulus, a person consistently, easily and "successfully" responds in light of a certain objective in mind. And in a bored culture with much downtime available, addictions spring up all the more readily; these addictions afford a consuming engagement, free from the fragmented, compartmentalized and humdrum realities of everyday life.[20]

Fifth, in theological terms, addiction has to do with idolatry, with finding our longings satisfied in something other than God. In the end, "the addict will do anything for his idol, including dying for it."[21] The addict is confronted with the theological question: "In whose name is your help? What is your only comfort in life?" Turning to God, clinging to God, walking with God is the ultimate hope for overcoming one's addiction problem.

Finally, let us not forget the demonic element in which the devil gains a foothold in our lives, perhaps allowing anger to turn into seething rage

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(Eph 4:26-27). In his *Confessions*, Augustine wrote about his battle with lust and how each choice he made served as a link in a chain that further bound him:

> I was held fast, not in fetters clamped upon me by another, but by my own will, which had the strength of iron chains. The enemy held my will in his power and from it he had made a chain and shackled me. For my will was perverse and lust had grown from it, and when I gave in to lust habit was born, and when I did not resist the habit it became a necessity. These were the links which together formed what I have called my chain, and it held me fast in the duress of servitude.[22]

Judgment. God judges sin because of his own nature, and what is not morally right cannot coexist with him. God is "holy"—set apart or separate from sin (Ps 5:4; Hab 1:13). So it stands to reason that separation is the inevitable result of sin, just as Adam and Eve were removed from the garden sanctuary, where they met with God (Gen 3:8); their intimate companionship with God was ruptured. Sin brings separation from God, the source of life: "The wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23; Is 59:1-2).

God in his grace gives humans a probation period—our lifetime—to reverse the choice of our first ancestors (Heb 9:27). God desires that none perish, and he commands all people to repent (2 Pet 3:9; Acts 17:30). His many kindnesses are designed to lead to repentance (Rom 2:4). But if the rejection of God's grace continues till physical death, the judgment—separation from God—is finalized. Humans get their final "divorce" from God. As C. S. Lewis said, the door of hell is closed from the inside.

This separation is self-inflicted, ultimately chosen by the sinner, which God allows. Is there an alternative for those who refuse to repent, for those who repeatedly resist God's influences (Acts 7:51). The judgment of separation is the choice of the sinner: "My people did not listen to my words and Israel would have none of me; so I sent them off, stubborn as they were, to follow their own devices" (Ps 81:11-12 NEB)—or as Paul reiterates in Romans 1: "God gave them up. . . . God gave them up. . . . God gave them up" (RSV).

To focus on sin as we have is, perhaps to some, the sounding of the depths of some vast and unfathomable cesspool. Indeed, we have been

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probing the edges of the horrors of impenetrable darkness. Scripture emphasizes the depths of human depravity, but it reminds us that this is not the end of the story. Sin falls between creation and redemption in the unfolding of Scripture's theodrama—the story of God's engagement with humankind that is moving toward consummation with a new heaven and new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Pet 3:13). The grim revelation of our sin against the splendor of God's glorious grace should prompt us to cast ourselves on God by crying out, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner," and by taking refuge in our great Redeemer. We are great sinners, but we have a great Savior.

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PART IV

VIRTUES AND VICES

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7

Becoming a Virtuous Person

Introductory Comments on Virtues and Vices

"A good name is to be more desired than great wealth," Proverbs reminds us. "Favor is better than silver and gold" (Prov 22:1). In our quick-access, high-tech, user-friendly society, the cultivation of virtue seems further removed from our thinking than ever. Bumper stickers advocate performing "random acts of kindness"—as though they are completely detached from character. The influential philosopher Immanuel Kant contributed to the detachment of duties from character. For him, doing the right thing is a straightforward obligation—without consideration for the character behind that choice or the array of previous choices that have shaped that character. Even before this, however, the Reformers emphasized duty and de-emphasized the importance of what we call "virtue ethics"—an ethic of virtuous character.[1]

The Greeks emphasized the cardinal virtues: wisdom (or prudence), courage, temperance (or self-control) and justice (i.e., fairness, lack of favoritism). These four virtues are interrelated, and they are connected to the mind (intellect), the passions (of the body and other deep human desires) and the will. Prudence (wisdom) comes from the mind's understanding and attending to what is good. Self-control (temperance) is the regulation of bodily passions and strong desires directed toward the good. Courage (fortitude) regulates other human passions toward the good in the face of hardships and obstacles that must be faced. Justice directs the will toward order in our dealings with others. So temperance and courage are con-

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cerned with keeping the inner sphere in order, and justice the outer sphere; both these spheres are directed by wisdom that guides the will toward the good. One author uses the analogy of government: self-control (temperance) and courage (fortitude) are the Home Office; justice is the Foreign Office; and prudence (wisdom) is the Prime Minister.[2]

These four virtues were commonly found on Greco-Roman "virtue lists," and New Testament writers included them in their virtue lists. But they added other virtues that reflected the character of Christ (e.g., Gal 5:22-23; Col 3:12-15). At points, Christian virtue lists included humility and meekness, for example, but these were at odds with what certain Greek thinkers valued.

Aristotle is the philosopher most closely connected to the topic of virtue. To live well—what he called *eudaimonia,* or well-being, flourishing—requires virtue. Virtue is a life lived according to reason. Being virtuous strikes the balance between the extremes of *deficiency* and *excess*—what he called the "golden mean." For example, the mean or balance between cowardice (a deficiency) and foolhardiness (an excess) is courage.

The Christian church recognized, however, that life "in Christ" involves *theological* virtues—*faith, hope* and *love*—to animate and deepen those virtues. So while humans even without the Spirit of God can grow in virtues such as kindness or generosity—part of God's "common grace" to all—the Spirit of God helps us to deepen and enrich these virtues in light of Christ's own life, character, self-sacrificing example at the cross, and resurrection. For example, believers can become even more courageous in the face of antagonism, persecution and death than they could by the sheer exertion of the will and self-discipline. Why? Because they understand that Christ laid down his life for them, that the innocent One died courageously while entrusting himself to the Father's will.

The Christian understanding of grace and the corresponding virtue of humility are missing in Aristotle. Humility was seen as a weakness in classical philosophy. For Aristotle, the "excellent" or "virtuous" person should never be in another's debt, but that means having no room for humbly receiving the grace of God and being grateful in light of it. Nor does Aristotle have any place for sin or evil, as the Christian does. And for Aristotle

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and other Greek philosophers, the virtues were cultivated by the individual; in the Christian faith, the virtues arise in the context of community life in the Spirit.

Jesus' vision of virtue is a far grander vision than Aristotle's. It is a vision that sees virtue (the fruit of the Spirit) as part of the new creation that God is producing for the new heavens and earth. He follows the Old Testament's vision of the Spirit's future outpouring—like waters in a desert—to produce moral fruits: righteousness, justice, peace, holiness, and joy (Is 32:13-20; 35:1-10; 44:3-4; 49:7-13; 61:1-11). This new covenant creation of a "kingdom of priests" and a "holy nation"—a renewed humanity—will issue forth in the ruling of the new creation after Christ returns. This virtue-shaping takes into account the need for human dependence on God, the centrality of love for God and others, the depth of human sinfulness, the need for divine grace and forgiveness, and the crux of the Christ event to give shape to the cultivation of virtue.[3] We should not separate the cultivation of virtue from the empowering work of the Spirit; as we daily submit to the Spirit's rule—being "filled with the Spirit" (Eph 5:18)—he continues to transform our character.

When it comes to *vice,* the church has highlighted the "seven deadly sins"—pride, envy, anger/wrath, sloth, greed, gluttony and lust. In Scripture, we see in Eden the beginnings of three key vices taking shape—bodily pleasure (or physical appetite, lust), covetousness (greed) and pride (glory). Eve saw that the fruit was good for food (bodily appetite), a delight to the eyes (greed), and desirable for making one wise (pride) (Gen 3:5-6). Similarly, Satan tempted a hungry Jesus to make bread (appetite), to display his powers for self-glory (pride) and to gain the world (covetousness) through compromise. As the second Adam, Jesus successfully resisted Satan (Mt 4; Mk 1; Lk 4), and he did this by a lifestyle of embodying purity, engaging in service to others, and by fasting and prayer (more on this below).

Furthermore, because he faced genuine temptation but yet was faithful in carrying out the Father's will, he is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted (Heb 2:18). Though Jesus was sinless, obedience did not come automatically. He learned obedience through the things he suffered (Heb

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5:8; cf. Lk 2:52). Although we cannot here address the relationship of the divine and human natures in Jesus of Nazareth,[4] Christians should not dismiss the moral struggle and temptations of Jesus with "Well, Jesus *was* God, after all." No, Jesus was not play-acting. As the truest human, Jesus models for us how to live in faithful obedience to the Father in the face of moral struggle and human weakness. We are called to be imitators of our Exemplar (1 Cor 11:1; Eph 5:1; 1 Thess 1:6; 1 Jn 2:6).

Another point about vice is that it actually affects our ability to think clearly and rationally. Many people assume that their moral lives don't affect their reason—that conscience and cognition can be cordoned off from each other. However, the Scriptures emphasize how vice darkens and corrupts the mind (Rom 1:21; Eph 4:18). The agnostic thinker Aldous Huxley wrote that he and his intellectual peers objected to morality because it interfered with their quest for sexual liberation; thus, he frankly admitted, they were able to come up with rationalizations to justify their lifestyle.[5] Yes, self-deception and suppressing the truth in unrighteousness are commonly connected to rationalizations for a promiscuous way of life; this process often takes place at a subconscious level, and this self-deception leads to a downward spiral of further rationalization and moral degradation.

Practicing Virtue, Avoiding Vice

Proverbs 4:23 is a powerful reminder to attend to the cultivation of our character: "Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life." Jesus warned hypocritical religious leaders of his day that although they looked good on the outside—like cleaned cups and whitewashed tombs—they are "full of robbery and self-indulgence" and "uncleanness": "So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness" (Mt 23:25-28).

In the Beatitudes (from the Latin *beatus,* "blessed"), Jesus highlights the character of disciples: realizing their own spiritual poverty before God; mourning for their own sins and the sins of others; having a controlled strength; being passionate about justice and committed to the will and rule of God; showing mercy to others because they recognize their own debt

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to a merciful God; being undivided in loyalty and devotion to God; being reconcilers of broken or damaged relationships; and bearing up under and even rejoicing in persecution for the sake of Christ (Mt 5:3-12). James, who expounds on the Sermon on the Mount, highlights some of these character qualities that demonstrate heavenly wisdom: "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace" (Jas 3:17-18).

Peter offers another virtue list: diligence, faith, moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love. These virtues, which should characterize us believers—in fact, they should be "increasing"—will render us useful and productive for God's kingdom (2 Pet 1:5-8). Indeed, Peter urges that his audience be *eager* or *diligent* about the pursuit of these virtues (2 Pet 1:10). Although people can be "fanatical," having a zeal without knowledge (Rom 10:2), properly directed *zeal* is an important virtue (cf. Is 9:7; 59:17; Jn 2:17; 2 Cor 9:2). Believers are to be "zealous for good deeds" (Tit 2:14; 1 Pet 3:13; cf. Rev 3:19). Paul admonishes believers: "Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord" (Rom 12:11 NIV). Remember that zeal is not mere busyness or activity or ambition. True zeal is the result of our intentional mindset to dedicate ourselves to the One who has given himself for us (Heb 12:1-3), but it can be stirred up by God's Spirit through fellowship with zealous, serious-minded believers as well (Heb 10:24-25) and through engaging in acts of service for others (Rom 12:7-8).

Paul's famous list of virtues, the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23), depicts the firstfruits of the new creation. It stands in contrast to the vices that characterize human fallenness—the "deeds of the flesh" (Gal 5:19-21). What many fail to notice is that these Christian virtues, except for self-control, are *corporate* virtues.[6] *Love* is a self-giving, self-sacrificing commitment to others (cf. Gal 2:20). *Joy* is characteristic of life together (Rom 14:17; 15:13). Joy is often linked with a well-ordered *peace* among believers (rather than dissension)—another community matter (Rom 14:17; 15:13; Eph 2:14-17). *Patience* deals with showing forbearance toward others (1 Cor 13:4: "love is patient"). *Kindness* actively pursues the good of the

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other (1 Cor 13:4: "love is kind"; cf. Eph 2:7). *Goodness* is related to kindness but is more all-embracing; when we practice it, it takes the form of "doing good to all" (Gal 6:9-10). *Faithfulness* is trustworthiness toward God and others (e.g., 1 Cor 4:1-2; 1 Cor 1:18; Col 1:7); this flows from our faith in God, having entrusted ourselves to God's utterly faithful character (cf. Rom 3:3). *Gentleness* refers to strength under control—like a well-trained horse—which places the interests of others ahead of oneself (cf. Mt 11:25-26; Col 3:12).

How do we increase in virtue and diminish the hold of sin in our lives? First, keep in mind that *corporate* virtues imply community life and corporate worship. Worshiping together in spirit and truth with fellow believers actually contributes not only to our spiritual growth; studies show that worshiping together impacts our *emotional maturity*—that is, we move beyond our own self-defined interests to concern for the larger common good. Our emotions are shaped by what we care about, and a deepened commitment to one another will help develop a deepened character.[7] Our emotions—and thus character—can be shaped by Spirit-directed worship that is guided by hearing and reflecting on God's Word. Indeed, episodes of emotion such as giving thanks (1 Thess 5:18), rejoicing (Phil 4:4), setting one's hope in God (Ps 42:5, 11; 43:5; cf. Ps 71:14) and taking courage (Ps 27:4; Jn 16:33) are not only *commanded* but are to be *enacted*.[8] Did you catch that? *We have a duty to hope, a duty to be joyful, a duty to be thankful.* By God's grace, we can cultivate a frame of mind that doesn't give way to despair, gloominess and grumbling. And as we engage with godly believers in worship and fellowship, we will exhort one another to carry out these emotion- and character-shaping commands (cf. Heb 10:24).

Horace said, "To flee vice is the beginning of virtue." But there is more. Paul tells us to discipline ourselves "for the purpose of godliness" (1 Tim 4:7-8). Some Christians stumble at this point: Isn't the Christian life a matter of grace? Shouldn't we simply do God's will because we feel inspired and inwardly moved to do so? Doing God's will should be our delight, right? Perhaps it feels "phony" to discipline ourselves rather than feeling freedom in doing the right thing. On the other hand,

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some Christians emphasize that believers must simply grit their teeth and "do their duty" to obey Christ's commands. If you don't feel it, big deal! Just get on with it! After all, the Christian life is about an obedient faith, not feelings.

So which is it, *delight* or *duty*? Actually, *both* aspects emphasize something important in the cultivation of virtuous character. Think about learning to play a musical instrument: before we can feel freedom and delight in playing, we need to learn notes, understand musical theory, practice scales and arpeggios, and know how to sight-read. Experiencing musical pleasure is preceded by a lot of repetitive "duties" involving hard work and perseverance. The same is true of language learning or playing sports.

In other words, doing our duty is important in shaping character *so that doing God's will becomes second nature to us.* Duty matters, but character matters more, and with a developed character comes delight in living wisely. This is why Paul said that when we have a Spirit-shaped character, then we are in good shape as far as God's will for us is concerned, and we are actually keeping the ultimate intent of the Mosaic law anyway (Gal 5:23).[9]

The development of character is not simply a transformation of the *soul,* but of the *brain* as well. By cultivating new habits and patterns, *physical* changes take place. As one cultivates virtuous habits, new neural pathways are carved out in the brain so that these patterns become second nature. For example, research with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) patients has demonstrated that by the establishing of counter-patterns to combat compulsions, the brains of these OCD patients change. Or take London taxi drivers, who must qualify by passing a rigorous exam. To receive their certification, they have to know all of the 25,000 streets of London, including which are one-way and two-way streets, and whether they remain two-way streets during rush hour. Studies have shown that these taxi drivers have enlarged brains in light of the serious memorization they have done.

This is not only a good argument against the idea that the soul or self is nothing more than the brain. It also reinforces the fact that virtue can become a habit, a settled way of life. Dr. Jeffrey Satinover of Harvard

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Medical School speaks of these new bio-neural pathways that are shaped through habit formation:

> The neocortex is the part of the brain that we might consider as the seat of the will. . . . It is also the part of the brain whose connections between the neurons will be slowly modified over time, strengthening some connections, weakening others, and eliminating some entirely—all based on how experience shapes us. This ongoing process embeds the emerging pattern of our choices ever more firmly in actual tissue changes. *These changes make it that much more likely for us to make the same choice with less direct effort the next time—and that much more difficult to make a different choice.*[10]

Think of how monastic movements have emphasized vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. This isn't surprising since three central areas of temptation are money, sex and power. So, a way of life devoted to cultivating the virtues of contentment, self-control and servanthood is a proper countermeasure to temptations toward vice.

To form Christian character, God's Spirit utilizes the life-shaping importance of the spiritual disciplines. These include both *engagement* (study, prayer, meditation, celebration, service, submission, worship, confession, fellowship) and *abstinence* (fasting, silence, solitude, frugality, chastity, secrecy, sacrifice). Authors such as Dallas Willard and Richard Foster have emphasized the central role of these disciplines in the journey to Christlikeness. Though the work of God, the Spirit's fruit does not come automatically—even if certain changes in some believers are more pronounced at conversion than in others. Cultivating character must be intentional and require diligence and attention. This is part of "working out" our salvation (which—note well—has been "worked in" to us), and this process requires relying on God's grace and power, because "it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Phil 2:12-13).

Unfortunately, some believers may view spiritual disciplines and the pursuit of virtue legalistically. They want to please God because they are intrinsically motivated because they love God. They want to obey God because this is the right thing to do, not because they might get caught, they'll disappoint others, or they'll be meeting with a weekly accountability partner tomorrow. But perhaps we should look differently at these

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extrinsic motivations. They have a rightful place as a gift of God's grace as we move toward virtue and obedience—just as children are trained by painful discipline (Heb 12:5-14). It is better to do the right thing for a lesser reason than not to do the right thing at all. The believer who checks in with his accountability or prayer partner or spiritual mentor recognizes he needs community assistance and support. Every believer needs others who can help stir him up to love and good deeds (Heb 10:24-25). What the individual may not do on his own he is more likely to do with the encouragement and support of the family of God. Avoiding pornography on the Internet because a faithful brother or sister will be getting a list of all the sites you've visited through a website filtering service is a gift from the Lord. Christians should avoid either-or thinking here, as though extrinsic motivators have no place whatsoever in spiritual formation. Believers should thank God for such gracious steppingstones in the direction of greater virtue and more consistent obedience. Furthermore, to be mired in guilt and shame after failure can become a discouraging vicious cycle unless one takes concrete actions to counteract such failures in the future—actions that include opportunities to confess freely and safely, gracious accountability and specific preventative measures. Doing so is a mark of repentance—not simple regret (2 Cor 7:7-12).

And just as we cooperate with God's Spirit in order to become virtuous, Christlike persons, we can become persons of bad or deteriorating character through the daily choices we make. We can grieve or thwart the Spirit's desire to produce virtue in us by failing to "guard our heart with all diligence." The tragic example of playwright Oscar Wilde serves as a sobering reminder:

> The gods had given me almost everything. But I let myself be lured into long spells of senseless and sensual ease. . . . Tired of being on the heights, I deliberately went to the depths in search for new sensation. What the paradox was to me in the sphere of thought, perversity became to me in the sphere of passion. I grew careless of the lives of others. I took pleasure where it pleased me, and passed on. *I forgot that every little action of the common day makes or unmakes character,* and that therefore what one has done in the secret chamber, one has some day to cry aloud from the house-top. *I ceased*

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> *to be lord over myself.* I was no longer the captain of my soul, and did not know it. I allowed pleasure to dominate me. I ended in horrible disgrace.[11]

Scripture itself points to such negative examples so that we might avoid such disobedience and character-corrupting choices and pursue godliness (1 Cor 10). As children of God, we have already been *accepted* by him through Christ (Rom 14:3; 15:7). But in the pursuit of Christlikeness, we *please* God: we "have as our ambition . . . to be pleasing to Him" (2 Cor 5:9).

Having looked at some of the foundational considerations about virtue and vice, let us look at a sampling of them in the next two chapters.

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8

Self-Control and Bodily Appetites; Greed and Contentment

Tragically, the very divinely given gifts of food, sex and sleep can become sources of temptation. Indeed, they have been abused and perverted by humans throughout history. Think of the God-given bodily desire or drive for food and drink. The *perversion* of this is gluttony and drunkenness. The gift of the human sexual drive can be twisted into all forms of sexual promiscuity. The human need for sleep can be perverted into slothfulness.

Indeed, these vices have often been given a *religious* justification.[1] Take *food and drink*: gluttonous feasts would be held in honor of the Roman god Bacchus, the god of wine and feasting. Then there's *sex*: religions in the ancient world such as Canaanite religions of the ancient Near East included cult prostitution. Within Hinduism, there are "tantric" sexual rituals and phallic symbols. What about *sleep*? Fatalism is characteristic of certain schools of Hinduism with their endorsement of the caste system and karma: one cannot do anything about one's station in life, since it is payback for what one did in a previous life. In fact, many Hindus believe that helping needy people in lower castes jeopardizes the kindhearted person's *own* karma in the next life because is trying to defy this cosmic law of cause and effect.

We can look at vice not only from a religious angle, but a sociological one as well. A study of a hundred American cities honed in on five of them as the "most sinful." This study used the seven deadly sins as the criterion: envy (crimes of burglary, larceny and car theft); gluttony (estimates of each city's obesity rate); greed ("the lower the percentage of disposable income

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donated, the higher the assumed greed"); lust (number of strip clubs per capita); pride (the number of plastic surgeons per capita); sloth (the "inactivity rate"—the percentage of the city that is not physically active).[2]

With playful irony, the late playwright Wendy Wasserstein gives five commandments to promote S-L-O-T-H: *sit* instead of stand; *let* yourself go; *open* your mouth and let anything you feel like enter; *toil* no more; *happiness* is within me.[3]

Philosopher Simon Blackburn, by contrast, writes in his book *Lust* that lust is "essential." He seeks to reclaim unencumbered lust for humanity and rejects that there can be any truly disordered sexual desire.[4] Lust is an enthusiastic bodily desire for sexual pleasure for its own sake, and Blackburn wants to remove negative associations from this word. (Of course, some Christians have erred in their assumption that sex is intrinsically dirty, and Blackburn reacts to this false picture.) In the sexual act, he asserts, two persons move toward human completion in their longing for unity. Of course, the God-given desire is to be completed in the context of marriage—a picture Blackburn repudiates. Let's look at this matter more closely.

Vices and Bodily Appetites

Lust. In the Hebrew Old Testament and in the Greek New Testament, several words are used to express strong desire—for *good* things as well as *evil*—though in the New Testament the chief words came to be used primarily for wrong desire. The essential thrust of the Greek word *epithymia* ("lust, strong desire") is that it is an inner impulse that can be a strong "trigger" for the will. The word for "desire" can be used positively—such as a person who "desires" (*epithymei*) to be an overseer in the church (1 Tim 3:1). The negative aspect of *epithymia* is the desire for satisfaction of pleasure and avoidance of nonsatisfaction such as pain.[5]

Impurity, another vice, is often associated with both sexual lust as well as spiritual defilement (idolatry). Both of these "defile" a person (2 Cor 6:14-18; 1 Thess 4:3-7). In Ephesians 5:3-4, Paul mentions defiling sins such as immorality and impurity—along with filthiness and coarse jesting (Eph 5:3-4). Paul urges the alternative course to take—namely, "giving of thanks." This is a common feature in Paul's writings—not simply to prohibit par-

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ticipation in vices, but to encourage engagement in virtuous living. Paul mentions "putting off" vices that belong to our old way of life "in Adam" (the "old man"), but he exhorts his readers to fill that vacuum by "putting on" like a garment those character qualities pertaining to our life in "Christ," the "new self" (e.g., Rom 13:12-14; Eph 4:20-24; Col 3:9-14).

Later in the book we address the topic of sexual lust, but we should note here that an intentional, disciplined reorientation of mind is required. For example, in the face of sexual temptation, we should not only think of the duty to *flee* such temptations (2 Tim 2:22) as well as the negative *consequences* our actions may bring—damaged relationships with God and humans, guilt and shame, and damaged character—but as believers we must direct our minds toward the fact that indulging sexual lust is a cheap and superficial pleasure (cf. Heb 11:24-25). We should remember that true, abundant living, though it involves self-denial, is the only way to become the humans we were meant to be (Jn 10:10; 17:3; Phil 3:7-10).

And to put the matter into even clearer perspective, the object of one's sexual lust—whether in a photo or in person—is a *person* whom God loves purely. This is a person for whom Christ died and thus a fellow human being for whom one can pray and show spiritual concern. That individual is another's son or daughter who (in pornographic depictions) is being exploited, objectified, degraded by others.

Gluttony and drunkenness. Overeating is identified as sin in both the Old Testament (Deut 21:20; Prov 23:21) and the New Testament (Lk 21:34). Given sparse mention of it in Scripture, one wonders why the medieval church cataloged this as one of the seven deadly sins. Like drunkenness, about which the Scripture says much more, gluttony is a sin of excessive intake. Now some may be overweight because of glandular imbalance rather than overeating; indeed, a glutton may eat excessively even if this is not evidenced outwardly. An added reason for discipline at the table is the need of others in the world who do not have enough to eat, which should encourage us to sacrifice for those in need. Thus, to eat intemperately is to violate the revealed will of God.

To counteract this vice, the spiritual discipline of fasting reminds us just

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how attached we may be to food to achieve contentment and well-being. In fasting, we focus on God—illustrating that "man shall not live by bread alone" (Mt 4:4)—and that our bodies should be our slaves rather than our masters (1 Cor 6:13; 9:27).

What of *drunkenness*? It is condemned throughout Scripture (Deut 21:20; 29:19; 1 Sam 1:14; Prov 23:20, 29-35; Is 5:11-12, 22; 28:1-8; 56:12; Hos 4:11; 7:5; Joel 1:5; Amos 6:6; Hab 2:15-16; Lk 21:34; Rom 13:13; Gal 5:20; Eph 5:18; 1 Thess 5:7-8); the judgment of it is severe. The momentous act of church discipline—disfellowshiping—is assigned to the drunkard (1 Cor 5:11). An even stronger divine judgment comes on those who refuse to repent: the drunkard shall not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9).

In our discussion of addictions in our overview of *sin,* we noted that treating alcoholism as an illness or a disease is misguided and even harmful. It suggests the alcoholic is a victim and bears no responsibility. However much a person is in bondage to this sinful habit, though, the initiating cause for most acts of drunkenness was some agent's deliberate choice at some point in her past.

We will not review the matter here, except to emphasize that despite alcoholism's vise-like grip, drunkenness is a *sinful* habit that calls for confession and repentance—the first step in the quest for freedom from bondage. No wonder Alcoholics Anonymous emphasizes not only need for outside assistance (what we would call "grace"), but also a person's responsibility for choices made and for wrongs done to others.

Not only does the Bible condemn acts of drunkenness vigorously, but in places it speaks against the use of alcohol as a beverage: "Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, And whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise" (Prov 20:1; cf. Prov 31:4-5; Is 5:11). Church leaders were not to be "addicted to wine/much wine" (1 Tim 3:3, 8; Tit 1:7).

Having said this, however, we note that Scripture does not teach total abstinence as God's requirement of all his people. Abstinence was a requirement for priests (Lev 10:8-10), Nazirites (Num 6:3-4) and John the Baptist (Lk 1:15). But Christ drank and was even (falsely) accused of being a drunkard (Mt 11:19; Lk 7:34). Nowhere does the Bible explicitly forbid drinking alcoholic beverages.

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Though both of us authors see potential dangers with alcohol, we approach the question somewhat differently.

McQuilkin's perspective. Why do so many Christians take a strong stand for total abstinence? Is such a stand biblically permissible? I believe total abstinence is the most biblical position in twenty-first century America. The principle is one of giving up my rights for the welfare of others (Rom 14; 1 Cor 8; 10) in a situation that is radically different from Bible times. In the biblical culture where water was scarce and often polluted, wine was the simplest way of purifying drinking water and was the common mealtime beverage. It was mixed with water, up to two hundred parts water to one part wine. In fact, it was considered barbaric to drink wine that was only half-and-half.[6] Because of the common use of high-alcohol-content beverages today, we have problems the people of Bible days could not have imagined.

In the United States nearly half the population drinks, and 8.5 percent are alcoholics (around 18 million). The result? Around 40,000 children born with mild to severe fetal alcohol syndrome (including brain damage and growth retardation); this is the leading cause of mental retardation. From 700,000 to two million Americans each day will be treated for alcohol dependency. Alcohol contributes to 100,000 deaths per year and to 40 percent of all traffic fatalities. Alcohol is involved in 86 percent of homicides and 60 percent of sex crimes. Each year, 183,000 rapes and sexual assaults are alcohol-related. Twenty percent of suicides involve alcohol.[7] But the human loss to families and to the drinker himself—who can measure it?

The only certain way to avoid alcohol- or drug-influenced thinking, speaking and behavior and to avoid addiction is not to take the first drink or the first dose of a drug. Though others may not reach the same conclusions from these data, I conclude that the production, sale and use of beverage alcohol and addictive or mind-altering nonprescribed drugs are incompatible with biblical principles. I am, indeed, "my brother's keeper," and I may, by my example, prove a stumbling block.

Copan's perspective. I hesitate in urging total abstinence since the Scriptures themselves suggest the festive, social, celebratory place of alcoholic

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drinks as a gift from God. Again, Jesus' own example does not suggest total abstinence. Jesus made fine wine from water (Jn 2:1-10). Indeed, "he came eating and drinking" alcohol and was thus called "a glutton and a drunkard" (Lk 7:34 NIV).

In the Old Testament, God allowed the Israelites to enjoy (in moderation, of course) wine and even "strong drink": "You may spend that money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen, or sheep, or wine, or strong drink, or whatever your heart desires; and there you shall eat in the presence of the LORD your God and rejoice, you and your household" (Deut 14:26).[8] God himself provided Israel with "curds from the herd, and milk from the flock, with fat of lambs, rams of Bashan and goats, with the very finest of the wheat—and you drank foaming wine made from the blood of the grape"—a picture of strong drink (Deut 32:14 ESV). The future celebration of God's redeemed people includes choice food and strong "aged wine" (Is 25:6).

At the Lord's table in Corinth, believers were getting drunk on wine (1 Cor 11:20-21). So Paul rebuked them, but he did not ban wine thereafter. It seems that both in the Old and New Testaments, alcoholic drinks of varying strength were seen as both a *blessing* from God (Rom 14:14; Col 2:20-23; 1 Tim 4:1-5; cf. Mk 7:15) as well as a potential *danger.* Christians strong in conscience have an obligation not to lead into sin those who do have a conscience about consuming it, and they should be cautious against any misuse of alcohol.

Sloth. God not only gave the delights of sex, good food, and drink when appropriately engaged in. He made our bodies to require rest. But even the blessing of sleep and rest can be abused. Protestants didn't come up with a biblical work ethic. The book of Proverbs strongly denounces sloth, urging the sluggard to learn lessons from the diligent, hard-working ant (Prov 6:6-11). One ought not to love to sleep (Prov 13:11; 20:13). Paul reinforced a strong work ethic in at least six of his letters. He urged working as unto the Lord; he highlighted his own example of working with his hands so as not to be a burden to anyone; he insisted that if a person did not work, he should not eat, and that a person should provide for oneself and others through hard work (Eph 4:28; Col 3:23-24; 2 Thess 3:10-12; 1 Tim 5:8). God,

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with his Son, is the model worker (Jn 5:17). Work is not a result of the fall. Rather, it is a blessing and a gift from God by which we honor and worship him (Rom 12:11; Eph 6:6-8; Col 3:22-24).

The Virtue of Self-Control

The term *self-control* (*enkrateia*) is used in the New Testament only four times (Acts 24:25; Gal 5:23; Tit 1:8; 2 Pet 1:6; in verb form, see 1 Cor 5:9; 9:25); its opposite—*lack of self-control* (*akrasia* or *akratēs*) is also found (1 Cor 5:7; 2 Tim. 3:3). Self-control concerns carrying out what one intends to do, despite influences and appetites to the contrary. Job exemplified this by averting his eyes from looking on a virgin to lust after her (Job 31:1), while David sinned grievously through failing to keep his body under rigorous control (cf. 1 Cor 9:27). Daniel purposed in his heart not to be defiled with the king's menu (Dan 1:8). One who controls one's spirit is more powerful than the military conqueror (Prov 16:32).

We have already addressed ways in which we can pursue self-control to counteract the vices of lust, gluttony, drunkenness and sloth. Our focus should not be on mere avoidance of indulging bodily appetites, but on *finding fulfillment in God* and *being willing to have God change our desires*—to get to the point that we say, "Why would anyone get involved in that?" Or as 1 Peter 4:3 puts it, "For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry" (NIV). That said, a lot of people trapped in sexual vices such as pornography do not *want* different desires. Like Augustine, they say to the Lord, "Give me chastity, but not yet"—or they want to live a "moderated religion"—religion "up to a point," as C. S. Lewis put it. And this is as good as no religion at all.[9]

How do we develop new desires? Dallas Willard's "VIM" strategy is helpful. It emphasizes embracing the right *vision* of reality and goodness—for example, seeing another person as God's image-bearing creation and the object of God's love. We take on the right *intention*—determining by God's grace to become like Jesus and to put off vices that prevent this. Finally, we appropriate adequate *means* to carry this out. And what are these means to carry out this intention? These instruments of God's Spirit are

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the various spiritual disciplines like prayer, fellowship (including accountability), reading Scripture, meditation and fasting. Christians need to recover these virtue-building disciplines so that, by God's Spirit, we might more fully become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet 1:4). Again, this self-control comes through reliance on God's grace: "the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation" (2 Pet 2:9). Nor is this self-controlled lifestyle a bleak, joyless stoicism. Rather, it is a channeling of our energies into the greatest possible fulfillment. And as we engage in this process, a *false* VIM will be replaced by a Christ-centered one.[10]

Covetousness (Greed) and Contentment

Scripture clearly prohibits greed or coveting (cf. Ex 20:17; Deut 5:21; Mic 2:2; Rom 13:9). In the New Testament, *covetousness* or *greed* (*pleonexia*) gets significant mention (Lk 12:15; Rom 1:29; Eph 5:3; Col 3:5; 1 Thess 2:5; 2 Pet 2:3, 14). Paul calls it "idolatry" (Col 3:5; cf. Eph 5:5), as material things become a God substitute and thus warrant divine judgment (Col 3:5-6). No wonder we cannot serve God and money (Mt 6:24). To covet can involve both desiring and seeking for something, someone, some position, some recognition or some pleasure not in the will of God. One can *desire* or *long for* something another has simply because that person has it and I don't—a phenomenon we readily witness in young children but perhaps not in ourselves: "you are envious and cannot obtain" (Jas 4:2). Coveting can include a grasping preoccupation toward material things or a sexual fixation on another person (e.g., Ex 20:17).

Of course, desire to have things is not evil in itself but rather an excessive, corrupted, destructive desire. Consumerism seems to be part of the American ethos; think of how people mindlessly "shop till they drop" or wander malls to see what they can purchase. Jesus said so much about money, possessions, greed, contentment and generosity. Why? Because our attitude toward money is a spiritual barometer—an *idolatry-meter.* Money is a key area where humans are often substituting created things in place of the Creator (Rom 1:23). Also, greed is a *root sin* (1 Tim 6:10) that can lead to stealing, adultery, murder and a host of other sins. Further, if the chief commandment concerns love, then covetousness opposes it: covetousness

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is interested in getting; love is interested in giving. Finally, greed destroys the one who covets since one can never be satisfied. Oil tycoon and one of the world's wealthiest men, John D. Rockefeller, was asked how much money it takes to satisfy a person. His reply was: "Just a little bit more!"

How then do we cultivate a spirit of contentment? What are the blessings that come to a contented spirit?

Contentment and generosity. The vice of greed stands in contrast to the virtue of *contentment* (*autarkeia*). A godly person should be content with the basics—food and clothing—and to cultivate this attitude is actually a great gain (1 Tim 6:6-8). Paul said he had learned to be content in whatever circumstances—whether in abundance or humble situations, whether well-fed or hungry (Phil 4:10-13). And let this be an encouragement to us—Paul "learned" to be content: it was a *process* to cultivate a mindset of gratefully receiving with an open hand the positive circumstances God bestows—not grasping them tightly—and to find strength and joy in Christ in trying circumstances.

The word *contentment* was used by the stiff-upper-lipped Stoics, who prized self-sufficiency. By contrast, Paul was saying that in any and every circumstance he could be content because *Jesus* gave him strength (Phil 4:13). Or as the author of Hebrews writes, "Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you'" (Heb 13:5 ESV). We covet because we fail to see our completeness in Christ (Col 2:10) and our adequacy coming from him (2 Cor 3:5-6)—that in Christ, we have all the needed resources to live a godly life (2 Pet 1:3). In the same spirit, Job asked his wife whether they should receive only good from God but not adversity (Job 2:10).

The vice of coveting is eclipsed by a spirit of contentment and gratitude. As it turns out, these virtues erode other vices such as pride and faithlessness (unbelief). A lack of gratitude and contentment makes it easy to covet. This vice also includes *worrying* about things that unbelievers routinely do—matters we should be entrusting to our heavenly Father (Mt 6:25-32).

But notice that coveting is also diminished by a spirit of *generosity*. Paul sees the incarnation and self-giving death of Jesus as the model for Chris-

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tians to follow in their giving: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich" (2 Cor 8:9). Jesus earlier had said, "Freely you received, freely give" (Mt 10:8).

In 1 Timothy 6:17-19, Paul brings together the virtues of *contentment* and *generosity:*

> *Contentment:* "Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy."
>
> *Generosity:* "Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed."

Contentment is marked by a spirit of generosity—giving of one's resources. We highlight here different types of givers: infant, childhood, youth, mature, and a special ability given by God.

Infant: No giving. The infant level of giving is *not* giving. Did you ever see a generous infant? They are in the getting business. Many professing Christians reflect the attitude of Spirit-less *unbelievers,* who are "natural" and "fleshly" (1 Cor 2:14; 3:3); they are lives that do not exhibit life in the Spirit or the fruit of the Spirit. We see this infant mindset in the "health-and-wealth gospel": "I'm a child of the King; so I go first class. Nothing but the best for the blessed." Others may proclaim Christ from selfish motives (cf. Phil 1:15), milking their "followers" to support their posh lifestyles. They appear to have more kinship with Simon Magus, who thought the gospel was a way to make money, than with Jesus (Acts 8:18; cf. 1 Tim 6:5).

Childhood: Impulse giving. Others give in response to the impulse at the moment. They generally live in a self-oriented way but give when there is strong emotional appeal—perhaps a malnourished child on the TV screen or the prospect of having one's name in print or on some building. Impulse giving has its place in the context of a generous, giving spirit that attempts to respond to needs as they arise. But impromptu giving by itself

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does not reflect the kind of giving that should be inspired by the incarnate, self-giving Christ.

Youth: Legalistic giving. Another category of giving is rooted in the Old Testament's principle of the tithe—giving the first 10 percent of one's income to God. On the one hand, tithing *can* be legalistic. On the other hand, for those with low incomes, a tenth may be quite a sacrifice. But even if one gives legalistically, that is far better than not to give at all (Mt 23:23; Lk 11:42; cf. Mal 3:8-12).

Mature: Management and sacrificial giving. The wise, mature-minded disciple will view material goods as a matter of wise management and means of sacrificial giving. They are inspired by the clear-minded vision that theirs is an enduring heavenly citizenship (Phil 3:19) *and* by the self-emptying example of Jesus, who gave himself so that we might benefit through his sacrifice (2 Cor 8:9). Management and sacrifice are two sides of the same coin—both pictures of robust discipleship.

Management giving assumes that God owns *all* the believer has, not simply a tenth, and it is motivated by a clear grasp of eternal values. Christians are simply *stewards* of all God has entrusted to them. The parable of the unjust, but shrewd, steward (Lk 16) doesn't commend doing slipshod work or cheating. However, the parable's point is highlighted by the master, who commends him for at least shrewdly planning for the future. Likewise, Jesus' disciples should not be foolish with money by failing to plan ahead; rather they should lay up treasure in heaven (Lk 16:8-9).

That the Christian is a *manager—not* an owner—is taught throughout the New Testament, not just in Luke 16 (Mt 6:19-34; 19:16-29; Mk 12:41-44; Lk 12:13; 17:7-10; 19:21-26; Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-37; 20:35; Rom 14:8; 1 Cor 6:19-20; 2 Cor 8–9; Gal 6:6-10; 1 Tim 6:5-10, 17-19; Heb 10:34; 13:5). The manager must be thoughtful, making hard decisions about where to invest most wisely and strategically to advance God's purposes and how much he may honestly invest in his own "traveling expenses" on the way to his eternal home. He will not mindlessly put money in the offering plate as it goes by on a Sunday morning. He will give to people in need, but not in a way that breeds unhealthy dependency or laziness. He will consider giving to ministries that are truly making an impact for Christ locally and around

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the world. He will consider supporting missionaries in foreign lands, which, incidentally, is steadily declining in American churches. He will open his home as a place of refuge and blessing. But there is another facet to giving as a mature follower of Christ.

In terms of *sacrificial giving*, the spiritually mature are also motivated by love, inspired by the self-giving example of Jesus, who became poor so that we might become spiritually and everlastingly rich (2 Cor 8:9). Second Corinthians 8–9 gives the most thorough exposition on Christian giving, which calls for cheerful sacrifice. Consider how David refused to offer a sacrifice that cost him nothing (2 Sam 24:24). Jesus commended an impoverished widow, who gave from her meager income "all that she had to live on" (Lk 21:1-4). In a society dedicated to luxurious living, wastefulness, sparing no pains to live a hedonistically inspired "good life," Christians are not only to be good managers of God's resources, but sacrificial givers. Just as Jesus laid down his life for us, we ought to do so for others, including sharing our resources with the needy, particularly in the believing community (1 Jn 3:16-17). Christians in poor Macedonia lived this way by giving both cheerfully and sacrificially (2 Cor 8:1-4; cf. 2 Cor 9:7)—even while those in prosperous Corinth did not.

Special grace: Faith. Based on the New Testament's teaching in particular, wise stewardship and sacrificial giving are the clear model of giving for the disciple of Christ. Yet Christian disciples should contemplate how to give even more sacrificially of their resources and pray for deepened faith in God to do so. John Wesley is an example of one who sought to limit his own expenses so that he could give away more and more of his income to advance God's kingdom. In his lifetime he earned over thirty thousand pounds, but he gave the vast majority of this away, keeping only what he needed to live on for himself. He lived simply that others might simply live.[11]

In addition, the Bible speaks of the *gift* of faith (1 Cor 12:9), which makes it clear that certain people are given a special ability to trust God in ways that others do not—like George Mueller of Bristol or Hudson Taylor, the noted missionary to China. Those who have the gift of faith in the area of finance move beyond managing wisely and giving sacrificially. They be-

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lieve God—and ask him alone—for what they do not have and cannot get in order to accomplish some task for him.

The blessings of contentment. What are the benefits of a contented spirit? First, those possessing the virtue of contentment will likely be generous with their resources. They are not ruled by money and thus can give generously. Various studies and surveys show that those with less money overall tend to be more generous than the more tight-fisted wealthy. One survey divided respondents into the categories of "money contented" and "money troubled": "Those who are most satisfied with their financial situation are not necessarily those with the highest income; contentment turns more crucially on a range of psychological factors. Inflation is partly in the eye of the beholder." The money-contented "rule their money rather than let it rule them." And even though the money-troubled were generally better off, they had frustrated material aspirations: wanting things they couldn't afford, being deep in debt, saving little, believing their friends had more money.[12]

Second, in commanding us not to worry but to trust him, God promises the faithful manager and generous giver to supply their needs according to God's glorious riches (Mt 6:19-34; 2 Cor 9:8; Phil 4:19). Ultimately, God will guarantee that investments made for his kingdom are never wasted but are eternal (Lk 9:12-13, 16-26; 18:18-30; 1 Cor 15:58; 2 Cor 9:6; Gal 6:6-10).

Third, while Christians should never be *dissatisfied,* they can justifiably be *unsatisfied* in certain respects. To be *dissatisfied* is to demonstrate unbelief and ingratitude—a destructive, corrosive sin (Rom 1:21). A godly person can be *unsatisfied* with the spiritual or moral status quo—as Paul said, pressing on "toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:14). Even in material things, Christians may be content but legitimately work hard to improve their condition.

Using time well and setting priorities. Improving one's condition can include not merely *money* use, but also becoming less wasteful and wiser about *time* use (Ps 90:12; Eph 5:15-16). One of Jonathan Edwards's famous "resolutions"—written just before his twentieth birthday—was: "Resolved: Never to lose one moment of time, but to improve it in the most profitable way I possibly can." Cultures do not view time the same way. Some em-

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phasize the significance of an *event* (e.g., meeting a person or going to church services) while others place greater stress on *punctuality* and *efficiency.* In either case, we must take care not to squander the gift of time—moments that, once used, can never be recaptured. And those living in more punctuality-oriented societies should not so highly prize efficiency that relationships are given lesser priority.

We should evaluate our use of time on a regular basis. In doing so, consider three steps of setting priorities, examining for inefficiency, and starting at the bottom and cutting. In setting priorities, we intentionally become *directed* persons rather than *driven* persons; this includes learning to say no to people sometimes, which can keep a check on the tendency toward a prideful "savior complex," to preserve God-centered priorities.

First, begin with the non-negotiables: fellowship with God, care for family, vocational responsibilities, physical exercise and rest/leisure, church involvement, maintaining relationships. Keep in mind that *all* of these are important, and we should not necessarily gauge importance in terms of "time spent on X." That is, God is most important, but that does not mean that we spend more time reading the Bible than we do at our jobs or with our families. This is thinking in *compartmentalized* terms ("first God, then family, then church, then work," etc.). Rather, as figure 8.1 indicates, we should take a more *integrated* approach—namely, *viewing God at the center of all areas of life and the inspiration of all we do;* all that we undertake should honor and glorify God.[13]

All of the spheres shown in figure 8.1 and the relationships they involve—family and home life, work, church, personal time, community involvement, political concerns—are important and matter to God. *All* of them are to be guided by love for the triune God and dedication to his will. So when Paul says, "Speak the truth to one another," he does not mean first to God, then to our family, then to our colleagues at work. Rather, this command is to be integral to *all* our relationships, and God's Word gives guidance for our conduct in those relationships. Daily, we must make discerning choices about obligations in each of these spheres and to walk worthily of the calling to which God has called us (Eph 4:1-2).

Though we must still make wise judgments about the use of our time,

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our point of orientation should be *love for God, which includes love for others.* This approach to prioritizing has several benefits. First, it reduces the frustration concerning the "God first, family second, church third" way of thinking. Second, this approach aims at integrating every aspect of life by bringing everything we do under the lordship of Christ rather than com-

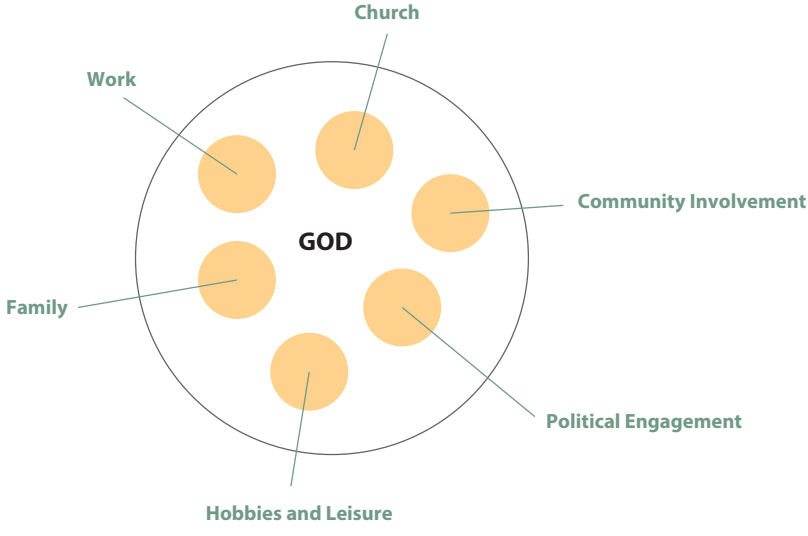

Figure 8.1. An integrated approach to priorities

partmentalizing between "sacred" and "secular" (1 Cor 10:31). Reading the Bible is a sacred act, but so is changing a child's diapers or repairing a customer's car. Third, this approach allows for flexibility and adjustment without guilt when a new set of circumstances arises. The demands on stay-at-home parents can be exhausting, and they may not have as much time as they would like for Scripture reading or attending a Bible study. But they can still glorify God in the thus-and-so-ness of life.

As we look at our priorities, we next need to *examine for inefficiency.* We should review not only the non-negotiables (what we *must* do), but we should also look down the line to the negotiables (what we *want* to do and what *others* may be expecting or asking of us) and then to the "unnecessaries" and especially the waste-of-time categories. God gives each of us

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twenty-four hours a day to do what he has called us to do, and we may be squeezed and harried because we fill our lives with what is wasteful, or we fail to make the most of the "dead time" or periods of waiting. Use such times for Scripture memory, prayer or catching up on reading to enrich the soul. Take a book wherever you go. On May 14, 1781, John Adams wrote in a letter to his son John Quincy, "You will never be alone with a poet in your pocket." We can also "double up" by running errands *with our children or spouse;* we can spend time with family as we *engage in church ministry together.* Every activity should be examined for ways to economize in time and still get the job done. My (Robertson's) late wife Muriel scoffed at the proverb, "If it's worth doing, it's worth doing well." "Very few things are worth doing well," she insisted, and accomplished in her life important things that two or three ordinary mortals might hope to do.

Finally, after making work and play as efficient as possible, if we still come short, we must *start at the bottom of the priority list and cut.* Are we devoting *more time* to certain activities than God demands—for example, spending longer hours on the job for a higher standard of living but at the expense of time with family? Ironically, our society has more leisure time available than our ancestors could have dreamed possible, but we are nevertheless tempted to be discontented and covet more time—in violation of God's command.

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9

Humility, Faith and Hope

In this chapter, we look at other key virtues: humility, faith, courage and hope. We also note their failure or vices: pride, fear and despair.

Defining Pride and Humility

How should we understand pride and humility? Is it a sin to take pride in one's country or family—or God? Is humility thinking "I'm no good"? Do we all just need a good dose of self-esteem or try to "find our authentic selves" as the solution to our identity issues?

Pride. Pride is in a class by itself as a—if not *the*—root sin. Why? Because it is a fundamental distortion of reality—reality about *ourselves,* about *others,* and about *God.* Of the ten different Hebrew root words for the concept of pride, almost all have the idea of being high up, exalted, elevated, grand, inflated, puffed up—as well as broadened or widened—whereas many of the twelve root words for humble and the twenty root words for humiliate have the basic idea of sink, bow down, depress, put down, subdue. The New Testament takes up these concepts of pride and humility and fleshes them out—particularly in light of the crucified Savior whom Christians serve and follow.

Pride is a lie. It is a distortion of reality in that we adopt an inflated view of ourselves. Pride is a false advertising campaign because we suspect others won't accept who we really are.[1] Sinful pride is thinking of self more highly than I ought to think (Rom 12:3). Thomas Aquinas considered pride an "immoderate" desire or estimation of oneself "that is not in accord with right reason"—that is, ascribing something to ourselves that we do not

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actually possess.[2] To be proud is to live in a world propped up with falsehoods about ourselves, taking credit where credit isn't due. It can take the shape of an autonomous self-confidence that operates independently of God or even attempts to displace God's sovereignty, including the assumption that we determine our own future (Jas 4:15-16; 1 Jn 2:15-17; cf. Ps 52:1; 74:4; 94:3). It is an attitude the leads to self-destruction (Prov 16:18).

Proud people takes themselves far too seriously! They are easily humiliated, offended or hurt, but not easily humbled—nor can they laugh at themselves. To prevent offense or hurt, they mount a skillful defense, utilizing various ego-protection techniques. These distortions of reality include the following:

Rationalization. This makes failure appear inevitable (e.g., "In a sex-saturated society, how can you avoid lust?"). We "made a mistake" or "messed up"—anything but "sinned."

Projection. We might look at others engaging similar sins and remind ourselves that "lots of other people are doing the same thing."

Repression. We "stuff" guilty feelings, and therefore bring psychological and spiritual damage to ourselves by refusing to seek forgiveness (Ps 32:1-5), but, of course, we can't overcome a sin that we refuse to acknowledge.

But didn't the apostle Paul take "pride" in his work of preaching the gospel where it had not been preached? Yes, but it was "not beyond measure"; it was a boast "in the Lord" (2 Cor 10:14-18). Paul was "proud of" early Christians' progress in their faith and in their proper use of God-given abilities (2 Cor 7:14; 9:3-4). As a Christ-dependent disciple (Phil 4:13), Paul recognized he could only "boast in the Lord" (2 Cor 10:17) and in the cross of Christ (Gal 6:14)—a recognition of divine reality, which actually expresses gratitude to God for his grace. One may also legitimately exult in other blessed realities—like one's children or parents (Prov 16:31; 17:6).

In summary, pride is setting on self a value greater than it merits. Businesspeople who rely on the impregnable fortress of their wealth, college professors who trust in their autonomous reason, scientists who arrogantly dismiss all reality beyond the natural, beauty queens who consider their charms invincible, athletes who congratulate themselves on their physical

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power and skill—all are relying on deadly illusions. And so are the preachers who believe the compliments their admirers heap on them, or the saints who consider themselves rather holy.

Humility. What then is *humility*? It is *a realistic assessment of ourselves*—and this includes our weaknesses *and* strengths. For a world-class pianist to say, "I really can't play piano all that well," is not expressing true humility. It is out of touch with reality—a *false* humility. True humility doesn't deny abilities, but rather acknowledges *God* as their source. So the pianist, while having worked hard to perfect the gift, succumbs to the temptation of pride by supposing to have arrived at the pinnacle of musical success without outside assistance. No, the pianist should acknowledge other influences and opportunities—and of course the Creator who ultimately bestowed these gifts (Jas 1:17). What do we have that we didn't receive (1 Cor 4:4)? To be humble is to know our proper place before God and others—with all of our strengths and weaknesses.

Humility also reflects a commitment to embrace truth wherever it leads—as best we can discern it. This dedication to truth will include adjusting my theological understanding or refining my moral judgments. Though "open-mindedness" can sound wishy-washy, G. K. Chesterton compared open-mindedness to eating: we open our mouths not to eat just anything we can put into our mouths, but to bite down on what is actually good to eat! This means being a good listener and seeking to understand another's position or mindset so that we do not mischaracterize or caricature another point of view (Jas 1:19).

Then what about God? Is *he* proud? It may come as a surprise to read that, no, God is actually humble. God has a *realistic* view of himself—not a false or exaggerated one. By definition, God is the greatest conceivable being, which makes him worship worthy. (Our word "worship" is a kind of contraction of the Old English word *weorthscipe*—or "worth-ship.") Although God is sovereign, there are some things he does *not* want credit for (Jer 7:31; 19:5). God doesn't "think more highly of himself than he ought to think" (Rom 12:3), but thinks accurately about himself.

The tri-personal God—Father, Son and Spirit—is other-oriented within himself and other-directed toward us creatures. This helps us to better un-

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derstand God's humility. God is a self-giving God within himself and toward us. Thus, the "high and exalted God" dwells "with the contrite and lowly of spirit" (Is 57:15). Psalm 113:5-6 describes a God who "humbles himself" or "stoops" to look on us creatures. Jesus of Nazareth describes himself as "humble in heart" (Mt 11:29)—and this just after his exalted claim to be the only revealer of the Father (Mt 11:27; cf. Jn 14:9). God's humility is most clearly seen in the incarnation: the Son of God did not cling to his heavenly privileges but emptied himself, humbling himself to the form of a slave who would die naked on a cross (Phil 2:5-11).

John's Gospel makes this connection clear: Jesus' being "lifted up" on the cross (Jn 12:32; cf. Jn 3:14-15; 8:28) is both *literal* and *figurative:* it is both the physical act of being raised up onto a cross and the *figurative* reference to exaltation and honor from God, which results in drawing the nations to salvation (Jn 12:32). Notice that Christ's humiliating death is precisely when he is "glorified" (Jn 12:23-24; 13:31-32). God's great moment of glory is in the experience of the greatest humiliation and shame—when he takes the form of a slave and suffers death on a cross for our sakes. This is how low God is willing to go for our salvation!

Furthermore, God's command for us to worship him is due to God's concern that humans be in touch with reality—that God is God—rather than creating our own God substitutes and thus damaging ourselves (Rom 1:25). To worship God is to align ourselves with reality rather than with fiction and falsehood. God seeks worshipers not because he is needy and insecure (cf. Ps 50:12). Rather, God desires that people worship him *in truth* (Jn 4:23-24). As one theologian rightly said, it's "truly godlike to be humble as it is to be exalted."[3]

Humility is a virtue of beauty in a polarized and increasingly rude society. Christians must take care to be civil in conversation and courteous in our speech rather than follow the contentious and dismissive spirit of the age. A gracious demeanor not only reflects a humble disposition but presents a winsome witness for the gospel. This is true not only in society, but also in the church, where theological disputes can become quite vicious. We authors have seen our share of theological witch-hunts, divisiveness and marginalization toward brothers and sisters in Christ—and

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the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles as a result (Rom 2:24). True humility keeps a proper handle on reality and does not overblow secondary theological differences; it keeps the main thing the main thing: "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity."[4]

Areas and Forms of Pride

One can take pride in a number of ways: pride of position (Mt 23:6-7; cf. 1 Pet 5:3), ability and achievement (1 Cor 2:1-3; see 1 Cor 4:7), possessions (Mt 6:24; 1 Tim 6:17), knowledge (1 Cor 3:18), spiritual or moral attainment (Rom 14:4, 12). We can easily compare ourselves to others to puff ourselves up—and we usually pick lesser examples: "I'm a pretty good person. I'm not like a Hitler or a Stalin." We can easily elevate our moral or spiritual greatness by comparing ourselves to the besmirched or even evil specimens of humanity. Or we can do so by putting others down. But God will not judge us by how we compare to others, who may have had far fewer opportunities than we have—opportunities we have perhaps misused and squandered.

In his devastating critique of the modern temperament and the scientist in particular, one of the great thinkers of the twentieth century, Charles Malik, put his finger on the basic problem:

> More serious is what happens to the scientist himself. . . . First is what I call the pride of knowledge and power. This is the subtlest failing. Because he controls his subject matter, the scientist slips into the feeling that he is a kind of god. People speak of the humility of the scientist; in truth I find very little humility among scientists. They know, it is true, but what they do not know is not only greater but far more important than what they know. The scientists are not noted for loving or sacrificing for one another. . . . They are more celebrated for their rivalries and jealousies, and for making sure that their ideas and discoveries are not plagiarized by others but are exclusively attributed to them. . . . If we are to characterize the spirit of the scientific community, we will have to say that in the final analysis it is passion for knowledge with a view to power.[5]

God puts all such pride in its place: whoever boasts should boast in the Lord rather than in might, riches or glory (Jer 9:23-24).

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What are some *forms* of pride? Some are highly visible, others so subtle as to go undetected altogether. Consider the levels of visibility in the form pride takes.

- Boasting. The most obvious evidence of pride is straightforward boasting. The braggart is so roundly condemned in Scripture that few serious Christians are guilty of boasting.
- Seeking praise. From birth, each of us works hard at "public relations"—ranging from the childhood "Watch me!" that gives way to more civilized and sophisticated ways of getting center stage. We may reject allowing our name to be published with the notice of our gifts, but it is not as easy to give with total anonymity (Mt 6:2-4). What matters is not self-commendation, but the one "whom the Lord commends" (2 Cor 10:18). If you come across a humble person, C. S. Lewis noted, all you will think about him is that "he seemed a cheerful, intelligent chap who took a real interest in what *you* said to *him*." He is someone who "will not be thinking about himself at all."[6]
- Accepting honor. Graciously receiving a heartfelt compliment from another, which we turn into a prayer of thanks to God, is not prideful. However, promoting an image of excellence that eclipses the honor due the Savior is idolatrous.
- Self-sufficiency. While we can be grateful for God-given capabilities and various honed skills, we must be careful not to adopt a spirit of independence that no longer depends on God or gives him thanks. As we note later, the technologies and conveniences of a modern world can prop up the illusion that we are in control and can get along without God. And if we routinely find it difficult to apologize and seek forgiveness or are regularly defensive and insisting on our own way, these are telltale evidence of a proud, brittle, self-reliant heart that is unwilling to confess one's own spiritual and moral bankruptcy, to consistently accept God's evaluation, and to rely steadily on God's resources.
- Pride masquerading as humility. While self-denigration may sound humble, it may actually reflect an attempt to gain attention. Putting ourselves down may simply be an attempt to beat another person to it, thus

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lightening the blow or perhaps attempting to elicit an ego boost from the other person. And fear to attempt something may stem from pride—unwillingness to let my weakness be seen, fear of being viewed a failure. Self-pity is often unadulterated pride, grieving that others did not see me for the truly great person that I am! If we are preoccupied with our own selves—even in the pursuit of boosting our self-esteem—humility will elude us.

Self-Image and Self-Esteem

How, then, does the question of self-image and self-esteem relate to pride and humility? We hear two contradictory voices—one emphasizing being crucified with Christ, that it is no longer I who live, that I must "hate" or "deny" myself to be Christ's disciple, that I am a "worm and not a man" (Ps 22:6). On the other hand, there are voices within the church saying the opposite: "A strong self-image is indispensable to successful Christian living; a poor self-image is the greatest cause of failure among Christians."

I (Robertson) was sitting in the hospital room, awaiting my late wife's return from emergency surgery. It was Sunday morning, and I turned for encouragement to television. "The solution is not to look at the problem," said the well-known preacher, "but to look at . . ." He paused and lifted his hands and eyes toward heaven and concluded, "the possibilities!" I thought of the possibility that the anesthesiologist might have erred. The preacher continued to encourage me: "What I want to help you to do is have faith in . . . *you!*" I didn't really find much consolation in that thought as the projected hour-and-a-half surgery was now stretching into three hours. I must confess, however, a powerful magnetism and strong fascination in what I learned of "possibility thinking." More people were desperately looking for jobs than at any time since the Great Depression; so "tough times never last, but tough people do" was a constant refrain that morning. "Believe it and you can achieve it!" In fact, "nothing is impossible unless . . ." I was waiting for a biblical quotation, but he concluded, "unless you have negative thoughts." There were other slogans intended to build a good self-image: "It takes guts to leave the ruts." "The me I see is the me I'll be."[7] I'm sure this would have been great therapy under other

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circumstances, but not in a hospital room, waiting with rising anxiety—or all the more in the face of death.

John Calvin begins his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* by saying that wisdom is comprised of two parts—the knowledge of God and of ourselves. And if we want to truly know ourselves, we must *first* come to know who God is: "No man can survey himself without forthwith turning his thoughts towards the God in whom he lives and moves."[8] Our *self-understanding* must be shaped by a proper understanding of God. In *God* we find ultimate *security* through *relationship* with him, and in him we find ultimate *significance* through a God-given *purpose* in life. To become what we were meant to be means being shaped into the image of Christ, the archetypal human. If we try to clutch our lives as the masters of our souls and the captains of our fate, the abundant life will elude us (Mt 16:25; Jn 10:10).

It's been said that the egotist is always "me-deep" in conversation. But such me-centeredness can eventually lead to getting sick of ourselves. And don't we often find greatest satisfaction in life when we have served the needs of others rather than becoming glutted by attending to self-concerns? If we follow Scripture, a true "self-image" is shaped by God's view of us—an image based on reality.

What about *self-esteem*? Since the 1970s, educational institutions, psychologists and the cultural mood have placed great weight on the need to boost self-esteem. But this has proven to be an utterly misguided pursuit. Psychology professor Roy Baumeister argues that recent research has shaken many psychologists' faith in self-esteem. Promoting self-esteem has not only wasted money, but it has brought harm to people. In comparison to other cultures, Americans tend to overrate and overvalue themselves. Like the children in Garrison Keillor's Lake Wobegon, we as a people think we're "above average." Rather than rewarding achievement, hard work, self-control and self-discipline, we give trophies to every kid on the soccer team and awards to anyone who just shows up for a meeting.

Yet self-esteem boosting—telling ourselves that we're good and great and wonderful—has not produced a more virtuous or more intelligent generation. One study of fifteen hundred American tenth graders revealed that student self-esteem *rose* after getting good grades and *fell* after getting

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bad grades. Notice that "self-esteem" *followed* the grades; it didn't precede them. This and other studies have concluded that self-esteem has had "no discernible effect on academic achievement"—or on avoiding sexual promiscuity and drug use or on preventing bullying. The self-esteem movement has not helped cultivate people's social skills, but has helped create a more narcissistic generation. Thus, the person with "high self-esteem" surrounded by others may think, "Wow, they really love me!" whereas those people are actually thinking, "What a conceited jerk!"

Baumeister strongly urges individuals and institutions to consider exactly what the Jewish-Christian tradition has emphasized—namely, the cultivation of *self-control* and *character.*[9] Or in the words of the apostle Paul: "But each one must examine his own work, and then he will have *reason* for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another" (Gal 6:4).

Just as the "self-esteem" movement offers an inadequate understanding of humanity, so does the "worm theology" of those who insist that humans are "zeros" before God. Actually, we are made in God's image and thus have value. Through redemption, God bestows even greater value on us as the "first fruits among His creatures" (Jas 1:18). So though we are sinful and *unworthy,* we are not *worthless.* Now, sometimes we'll hear sermons affirming that "if Christ were to die for just you alone, he would have done so." *If* that's true, this isn't a statement about how great *we* are, but rather about how great *God's* love is toward sinners. A proper understanding of self must be anchored in biblical reality: we are God's creation; we have been damaged; and now we are being transformed as God's new creation (2 Cor 3:18; 5:17).

In Paul's own experience, he seemed to grow in humility, not by trying to boost his self-esteem, but by looking to the grace of God in Christ. As we read his letters in chronological order, we see Paul presenting himself (in A.D. 55) as "the least of all the apostles" (1 Cor 15:9); later (A.D. 62), he writes that he is "the least of all the saints" (Eph 3:8); later still (A.D. 64), he writes that he is the "chief of sinners" (1 Tim 1:15). Though a sinner, Paul displayed a remarkable confidence because of his position "in Christ." As a result, he could boast in his own weaknesses (Rom 5:3; 2 Cor 4:7-11; 10:8-18; 11:23-30; 12). But whether in incredible achievement or weakness,

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he gave God the credit: "So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth" (1 Cor 3:7). "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me" (1 Cor 15:10).

Brother Lawrence (1614–1691), the lay Carmelite brother who "practiced the presence of God" in his day-to-day activities and chores, puts matters into perspective: "When I fail in my duty, I readily acknowledge it, saying, I am used to do so: I shall never do otherwise if I am left to myself. If I fail not, then I give God thanks, acknowledging that the strength comes from him."[10]

The Antidote for Pride

Pride is an exalted, inflated opinion of self—a lie; humility takes a realistic picture of oneself, recognizing strengths and weaknesses. We have seen that God himself is the example of humility—a realistic assessment of who he is—which is not incompatible with greatness. We see humility with greatness in the person of Jesus Christ most clearly (Mt 11:27-29). How do we, by God's grace, cultivate the humble mind of Christ (Phil 2:1-5)?

First, we should be *quick to confess our sins and inadequacies* before others rather than covering them up or excusing them. An excellent, insightful help in this regard is theologian John Baillie's daily prayer guide for morning and evening, *A Diary of Private Prayer*—which my (Paul's) family has used over the years.[11] Second, we should readily express *gratitude and praise to God and others* rather than always seeking credit for ourselves. President Reagan had a plaque on his desk in the Oval Office that read: "There is *no limit* to what a man can do or where he can go if he does not mind who *gets the credit.*" This kind of attitude reflects a humble spirit. Third, *practice the spiritual discipline of secrecy.* We may be tempted to show off our spiritual or moral lives to others, but Jesus' command to give alms, fast and pray in secret is appropriate here to counteract pride (Mt 6). But doesn't Jesus tell us to let our light shine before others and see our good works (Mt 5:16)? There is a twofold exhortation against pride, which we have mentioned earlier: *show when tempted to hide* (e.g., Mt 5:13-16) and

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hide when tempted to show (Mt 6:1).[12] We may resist doing the right thing in front of others out of pride, or we may want to show off our "spirituality" before others out of pride. As Dallas Willard wrote, we should "place our public relations department entirely in the hands of God."[13] Fourth, *assume the servant's role* in the lives of others. The New Testament uses the language of believers in the body of Christ being "enslaved" to one another in love (1 Cor 9:19; Gal 5:13).[14] The focus in New Testament teaching on humility is more on loving, self-sacrificing action than a frontal attack on prideful attitudes (Mt 20:26-27; Mk 10:43-44; Lk 22:26). Intentionally take the role of the slave or servant, as Jesus did (Jn 13:1-17), and humility will come as a by-product. Fifth, *suffering is God's gift to produce a humble spirit.* Paul often gloried in his weaknesses (2 Cor 11:30; 12:5, 7), which have a way of challenging our pride and deepening our dependence on God's grace.

The godly English clergyman Jeremy Taylor (1613–1667) lists practices aimed at promoting humility of spirit.

> The grace of humility is exercised by these rules:
> Think not thyself better for anything that happens to thee from without.
> If thou callest thyself fool, be not angry if another says so of thee. He is a hypocrite who
> accuses himself before others with an intent not to be believed.
> Love to be concealed and little esteemed, never being troubled when thou art slighted or
> undervalued.
> Never be ashamed of thy birth, thy parents, or thy present employment, or for the poverty
> of any of them.
> Never speak anything directly tending to thy praise or glory.
> When thou hast said or done anything for which thou receivest praise, take it indifferently and return it to God for making thee an instrument of His glory.
> Use no stratagems and devices to get praise.
> Suffer others to be praised in thy presence and think not that the advancement of thy
> brother is a lessening of thy worth.
> Never compare thyself with others. . . .

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Be not always ready to excuse every oversight or indiscretion or ill action,
but if thou be guilty of it, confess it plainly.
Give God thanks for every weakness, deformity, and imperfection and
accept it as a
favor and grace of God and an instrument to resist pride.
Upbraid no man's weakness to him to discomfort him. Be sure never to
praise thyself or
to dispraise any man else, unless God's glory or some holy end do hallow it.[15]

Fear, Faith, Courage and Hope

Just as lust, greed or pride can be distortions of basic God-given drives, so can self-interest and self-preservation. As the human instinct for self-protection is strong, it can succumb to fear or worry and override faith, courage and hope.

Fear and faith. When the strong drive for survival becomes obsessive or overpowers other higher obligations, it becomes sinful. There is no moral law that demands preservation of my well-being or life at all costs. On the contrary, a higher loyalty to God and even love for others may well demand self-sacrifice rather than self-protection. In answer to the sin of unbelieving fear are the virtues of faith and courage.

"Do not fear, for I am with you" is a repeated command and comfort to saints throughout the Scriptures (e.g., Gen 26:24; Is 41:10; 43:5; Jer 46:27). God frequently reminds his people that he is present, that he has heard their prayer, that he is for them, that he is acting on their behalf. The presence of God/Jesus rightly brings comfort and courage to the fearful believer (Mt 14:26-31). God's presence turns fear into trust and courage (Josh 1:9; 1 Chron 28:20; 1 Cor 16:13; Phil 1:27-28; 2 Tim 1:7).

When God spoke to Abraham, he told him, "Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great" (Gen 15:1). God promised that he would give Abram descendants outnumbering the stars in the night sky (Gen 15:5). Abram responded by trusting in the presence and promise of God; he believed God, and he was reckoned righteous (Gen 15:6). *Believing, having faith,* or *trusting* are synonyms, and they reflect *relationship.* Abraham *entrusted himself* to God. In John's Gospel we read that though

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others "believed in" Jesus, Jesus didn't "believe in" or "entrust himself to" the crowds because "He Himself knew what was in man" (Jn 2:23-25). While the failure of faith is *idolatry*—putting our trust in God substitutes—as we continually entrust ourselves to God (1 Pet 2:23; 4:19), we will exhibit *faithfulness* or *trustworthiness* in our relationship with both God and our fellow human beings.

But doesn't Scripture remind us that we should "fear God and keep His commandments" (Eccles 12:13) and that the "fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov 1:7; Prov 9:10-12)? How does this square with the command "Do not fear"? The "fear of the LORD" in Scripture is, first of all, *objective.* It involves a confident trust in God; "those who fear the LORD" is a relational category, referring to those who belong to God and have faith or hope in him (Gen 20:11; Deut 10:20; Ps 33:8; 34:7; 103:11, 13; 111:5; 147:11). This "fear" is also *affective*—that is, it impacts our feelings. While the Bible uses "fear" to cover a range of ideas—from *terror* to *respect*—"fearing God" is found in between these extremes, and a right view of God can impel us to godly living. In light of the fact that we must all appear before Christ's judgment seat, Paul says, "knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Cor 5:11).[16]

Perhaps the important questions to ask here are, whose *approval* do you most seek? And whose *displeasure* is uppermost in your mind? All too often, we are more motivated by the fear of humans than the fear of God (cf. Is 8:12-13). Do we feel the burden of guilt or squirm with shame primarily because we have had to acknowledge our wrongdoing to others *or* because we have sinned against God? The believer who walks by the Spirit will increasingly recognize that God's approval and disapproval matter most.

Courage. According to Aristotle, *courage* is the "golden mean" between the extremes of foolhardiness (excess) and cowardice (deficiency). Courage has been a universally acclaimed virtue, often connected with "manliness," especially in the context of battle and the fear of death. In J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter series, the dark character Voldemort has no courage because he considers death an ignominious defeat, an awful human weakness. By contrast, Harry and his friends Ron and Hermione are regularly risking their lives; they are willing to face death for what is good and right.[17]

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In Scripture, courage, like faith, is also connected to fear (Mt 14:27). Fear seems to be most closely connected to lack of faith, and certainly its opposite—courage—is born of faith in God. Fearlessness is not in itself a virtue since trust or confidence is misplaced and therefore not reliable—say, bad advice from a godless psychiatrist. But those who put their trust in God will not be "disappointed" or put to shame (Ps 22:5; Rom 9:33; 10:11; 1 Pet 2:6). God will not betray the trust of the righteous; he will not allow them to be "shaken" (Ps 55:22; cf. Ps 15:5; 16:8; 62:2, 6; etc.). Confident trust in God—put another way, "fearing the LORD" (cf. Gen 20:11)—produces courage: "And you are not to fear what they fear or be in dread of it. It is the LORD of hosts whom you should regard as holy. And He shall be your fear, and He shall be your dread" (Is 8:12-13). Psalm 56:4 brings together fear, faith in God, and courage: "In God I have put my trust; I shall not be afraid. What can mere man do to me?"

Hebrews 11 commends the remarkable courage and valor of many Old Testament saints: Abraham leaving his homeland; Moses opposing Pharaoh and refusing the passing pleasures of sin to identify with his people: Daniel's friends telling king Nebuchadnezzar: "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods!" (Dan 3:17-18 RSV). While some escaped the edge of the sword and women received back their dead, *others* showed courage in that they faced torture, imprisonment, death and deprivation (Heb 11:32-40): "the world was not worthy of them" (NIV).

Paul too was a model of courage, having been beaten countless times, whipped, stoned, shipwrecked, faced constant danger and all manner of harsh circumstances (2 Cor 11:23-27). Jesus himself was the exemplar of courage and trust in his Father as he faced temptation, opposition, abandonment and death. Because of Christ our champion or hero (*archēgos*), we too should willingly endure shame and hostility (Heb 12:1-3). Yet *all* believers are called to follow in his steps—to endure to the end (Mt 10:22; 24:13; Mk 13:13), to overcome so that we may receive "life indeed" (Rev 2:7, 10-11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12-21; 21:7). Eternal life is not the lot of the cowardly and unbelieving (Rev 21:8).

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As we noted, in the Greco-Roman world, courage was a virtue commonly connected to a military context—to the fear of death in battle. Courage for Christ's followers, however, includes at least three important areas. First, *boldness is needed to proclaim the gospel* (Acts 4:31; 23:11; Rom 1:16; 1 Cor 16:13-14; Eph 6:19). This boldness is not self-manufactured; Paul asks for prayer—for grace—to proclaim the mystery of the gospel boldly (Eph 6:19; Col 4:3). Second, *courage is necessary in facing death (martyrdom) for the sake of the gospel:* "they did not love their life even when they faced death" (Rev 12:11).[18] Believers throughout history have been "faithful until death," not fearing those who can kill the body but do nothing more (Rev 2:10, 13; Mt 10:16-28). Today, the church is severely persecuted in many parts of the world—under Islam, Hinduism and Communism—and we must be vigilant in prayer for our brothers and sisters. Even so, Christians in the West are seeing increased threats to the Christian faith through a growing, hostile secularism.

Finally, *courage is required for daunting tasks or challenges to which we are called.* Perhaps due to temperament or lack of experience, we find ourselves shrinking back or withdrawing altogether from tasks to which God has called us. Or perhaps we may be tempted to compromise our faith or convictions in the face of family or cultural pressures. Thomas Aquinas referred to a vice he called *pusillanimity*—"smallness of soul." How do we aspire to "greatness of soul"? By diligently renewing our minds (Rom 12:2) as we expand our picture of who God is by reading Scripture, worshiping with others and studying what God has done through his saints in history and in his people around the world today. We must catch a renewed vision of the love of God in Christ and take confidence in his unshakable kingdom and eternal purposes. Whatever obstacles and hostilities the believer may face—including death—God is "for us." As a result, "in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us" (Rom 8:37). It is God's love for us that should constrain us and give us courage (2 Cor 5:14).

In J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings,* one Hobbit from the Shire, Frodo Baggins, must take to Mount Doom that alluring, yet pernicious, ring that has brought trouble not only to its wearers but to all of Middle Earth. Into the fires of Mount Doom he must throw this awful, loathsome thing. The

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trek to get there is perilous and emotionally exhausting, and it requires courage. Frodo tells his faithful Hobbit friend Samwise Gamgee, "I can't do this, Sam." But Sam tries to put the matter into clearer perspective:

> I know. It's all wrong. By rights we shouldn't even be here. But we are. It's like in the great stories, Mr. Frodo—the ones that really mattered. Full of darkness and danger, they were. And sometimes you didn't want to know the end. Because how could the end be happy? How could the world go back to the way it was when so much bad had happened? But in the end, it's only a passing thing, this shadow. Even darkness must pass. A new day will come. And when the sun shines, it will shine out the clearer. Those were the stories that stayed with you—that meant something—even if you were too small to understand why.[19]

And Gandalf the Wise also reminds Frodo: "We cannot choose the time we live in. We can only choose what we do with the time we are given."[20]

Paul reminds Timothy that God has not given us "a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline" (2 Tim 1:7). We may find ourselves intimidated and overwhelmed by challenges before us. We may recoil and withdraw. But we must learn the lessons from Moses, Jeremiah and other saints who were intimidated by the greatness of their tasks. Let us remind ourselves that God is indeed for us, that Christ's strength is made evident in weakness, and that he can equip us to carry out daunting tasks or face difficult obstacles by his grace.

Hope. As faith, hope and love are three "theological virtues," we should comment on the virtue of hope.

In Japanese, there is no native word for "hope." Yet by the power of God's Spirit, a surprisingly large number of Japanese are drawn to the music of Johann Sebastian Bach, whose music inspires them and whose words fill them with a sense of hope. One Christian academic in Japan says, "Bach is a vehicle of the Holy Spirit." Though just 1 percent of Japan is Christian, nearly 10 percent of Japan's population is quite sympathetic to the Christian faith, most of whom had first been exposed to Bach's music. One such sympathizer, not a believer, is Tesuo O'Hara, who edited a collection of Bach's works. He was asked, "What makes Bach so successful among the Japanese?" O'Hara replied, "Bach gives us hope when we are

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afraid; he gives us courage when we despair; he comforts us when we are tired; he makes us pray when we are sad; and he makes us sing when we are full of joy."[21]

Hope is future directed, and it is connected to a story. The stories some people believe are utterly mistaken—and thus a false hope (e.g., "hope in riches," 1 Tim 6:17)—or it may be a *true* hope that needs to be encouraged and better informed: "We had hoped that [Jesus] was the one to redeem Israel" (Lk 24:21 RSV). The believer has "the hope of eternal life" anchored in a "God, who never lies" (Tit 1:2 ESV). We have a hope that a tear- and grief-free new creation will be established (Rom 8:22).

As with the virtues of humility and faith, true hope is anchored in reality. We can affirm that an upbeat, optimistic spirit is more pleasant than the Eeyore-like pessimist—the proverbial wet blanket. But hope is not mere optimism—some confidence in human progress or that "things are going to get better." Atheist philosopher Bertrand Russell believed that humans were accidental arrangements of atoms and that all human achievements would be obliterated in the distant, but certain, extinction of the sun. Thus an individual has to build his philosophical home on the foundation of "unyielding despair."

Despair, of course, is the opposite of hope, and at least we can commend Russell for refusing to play philosophical, optimistic "pretend" games. However, his own outlook was deeply mistaken and his despair unnecessary. In Christ's death, we have a "steadfast" hope in the midst of life's storms—an "anchor of the soul" (Heb 6:19). Scripture connects hope to faith: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb 11:1). If we entrust ourselves to the ultimate reality—the triune God—rather than idolatrous substitutes, then this will produce in us hope rather than despair.

Hope can arise when we come to trust God and thus be strengthened through our earthly trials. Suffering produces endurance, which produces proven character, which produces hope (Rom 5:4-5). An early Christian apologist Justin Martyr (A.D. 100–167) had once been a disciple of Plato's philosophy. But he was utterly struck by the hope and courage that persecuted Christians exhibited in the face of death: "For I myself, too . . . heard

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the Christians slandered, and saw them fearless of death, and of all other things which are counted fearful, perceived that it was impossible that they could be living in wickedness and pleasure."[22] Thus, realizing that none of his former philosophies was fully satisfying, Justin finally arrived at the truth of the gospel, finding "this philosophy alone to be safe and profitable."[23] Of course, persons can become embittered in the face of trials, being willing to accept good but not adversity (Job 2:10).

Because the believer *begins* to experience eternal life—a qualitatively distinct and supernatural life—in the *present* (Jn 10:10; 17:3), this gives rise to hope for the future. As the hymn exults, "Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine! / Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!" Furthermore, having hope that we will see Christ and be like him inspires us to holy living: "Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as [Jesus] is pure" (1 Jn 3:3 NKJV). That is, because of a future hope of finding ultimate fulfillment, we refuse cheap, superficial, though tempting, imitations that promise much but fail to deliver. Many have been seduced by the thought of just another drink, just another sweet, just another sexual encounter. But succumbing to them is not only a failure of faith (idolatry) and of love for God (selfishness), but also a failure of hope (despair).[24]

Conclusion

While we could add many more virtues (and vices) to our discussion, we have reviewed a number of them. We have observed that godly character requires intentionality and Spirit-inspired and sustained self-discipline; all of this springs from the *grace* of God that instructs and motivates us to deny ungodly desires and to be zealous for good deeds (Tit 2:11-14). Apart from the Spirit's role in transforming us, he uses human instruments to help us become more virtuous, Christlike persons. Yes, Jesus used the language of discipleship—of "following after" or "coming after" and even "imitating" Christ as our "example" (Mt 16:24; Jn 13:14-15). But we are called to imitate earthly mentors who are Christlike role models (1 Cor 4:16; 11:1; 1 Thess 1:6; 2 Thess 2:14; Heb 6:12; cf. 2 Tim 2:2).

Also, we have seen that what we do in the body matters to God. Here the spiritual disciplines are important, but we should not view them as

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sheer self-denial. The Spirit-led life involves both *abstaining* and *engaging;* that is, we undertake life patterns that encourage both self-control and endurance (1 Tim 4:7-8) as well as the intentional celebration of God's grace and goodness (1 Tim 6:17). As we walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:16, 22), we must commit ourselves to putting on Christ and his virtues and to taking off the corrupting vices associated with the "old self," Adam (Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:5-14); in so doing, we will find that obedience, wisdom and the love of virtue will increasingly become "second nature" to us.

To partake in these Christlike virtues is to begin to experience the fruit of the new creation—in anticipation of the new heavens and new earth in which righteousness will fully dwell (2 Pet 3:13).

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PART V

ETHICAL ALTERNATIVES

As Western culture increasingly moves away from its Jewish-Christian heritage, we as believers will less frequently be able to make the appeal to the Bible as a moral authority ("But the Bible says . . ."). A couple of generations ago, the Bible—*special* revelation—was commonly considered authoritative. But in our increasingly secularized society, we frequently hear that the Scriptures are no more authoritative than the Qur'an or the Book of Mormon. Furthermore, atheists will tell us, "We can be good without God." They will add that they can follow other ethical systems—secular ones—rather than believe that God is the foundation for objective morality. In our discussions with our atheist friends, we may find ourselves needing to begin where C. S. Lewis did in his book *Mere Christianity.* Our sense of moral duty and our awareness of objective right and wrong give us a clue to the meaning of the universe. Everyday conversations and scenarios—from not cutting in front of someone in line, to knowing the difference be-

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tween accidentally and intentionally tripping someone, to our longing for justice in the face of evil—can help us begin that important conversation. We will often have to begin our ethical discussion with unbelievers by looking at God's *general* revelation and the moral law within before examining *biblical* ethics. Because of this, we want to look briefly at the leading ethical systems that are often utilized to bypass God altogether.

One noted philosopher recently wrote about three dominant ethical theories in the academy these days. They focus on morality based on *consequences,* on *agreement* and on *duty.*[1] So it would be important for Christians to have at least a general awareness of these theories—their characteristics, their assumptions, their shortcomings as well as some genuine moral insight they may offer. There are two other ethical perspectives that have shaped much of Western thought and thus deserve attention: moral relativism (including its sibling, situation ethics) as well as evolutionary ethics. In chapter ten, we will offer a brief response to relativism/situation ethics, social contract (*agreement*) and utilitarianism (*consequences*). Then in chapter eleven, we'll look at Kantianism (*duties*) in addition to claims that naturalistic evolution is the basis for ethics. As we note, without God as the foundation for intrinsic human dignity and moral duties, no ethical system can ultimately be sustained.

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10

Relativism, the Social Contract and Utilitarianism

Moral Relativism: "That's Right for You, but Not for Me"

In *The Abolition of Man,* C. S. Lewis referred to the creation of "men without chests" in Western society—that is, humans without virtue or moral backbone: "We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honour and are shocked to find traitors in our midst."[1]

Moral relativism emphasizes that an act's rightness depends on culture or circumstances: "When in Rome, do as the Romans," the saying goes. A common slogan we hear today is, "That may be right for you, but not for me." So can we *really* criticize Nazi concentration camp guards who were "just following orders"?

Whatever is wrong with moral relativism (indeed, its sins are many), it offers two correct insights. First, people *do* have moral disagreements; however, many—though certainly not all—moral disagreements are more at the level of application than underlying moral principles. Second, moral acts do have a context. So we should take context into account when making moral judgments: Is an act of killing done to protect loved ones during a home break-in? Is it to protect one's homeland from an invading army? Or is the killing the result of a random drive-by shooting? Context matters.

Yet moral relativism is a problem for a number of reasons. First, it denies the fundamental fact of the intrinsic dignity of human beings. This dignity is anchored in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27). If humans have dignity and

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worth—a reflection of the image of God and the basis for our talk of universal human rights—then relativism is false. This value exists regardless of one's culture.

Second, the problem of evil regularly reminds us all that the world is not what it should be. We know that women ought not to be raped or children abused. The very *obviousness* of evil is an argument against moral relativism. Why deny horrific evils only to embrace the relativist's counterintuitive belief that real evils don't exist? The burden of proof rests on the relativist, who denies the obvious.

Third, relativism suffers from the "reformer's dilemma." Though "Christians" have been blamed for many troubles in history, the inescapable fact is that followers of Christ have been at the forefront of eradicating many of the world's evils: Christians helped eradicate slavery, affirm racial and sexual equality, and ban suttee (widow burning in India). These were important moral achievements, but the relativist cannot affirm this since this would imply a moral standard—that moral conditions have improved from inferior conditions. This serves to remind us that true moral values are *discovered,* not *invented.* For example, black people already possessed dignity and worth *before* any civil rights legislation was passed. They didn't acquire value just because a law was passed.

Fourth, relativism is inconsistent: relativists oppose intolerance or "forcing your views on others," which they take to be absolutely wrong for *all* people. The "politically correct" are quick to call traditional morality "judgmental" and "intolerant," but these accusations assume a normative moral standard.

A variation on moral relativism is situation ethics, a view made popular by the late Joseph Fletcher. Gone are the rules, laws and commandments allegedly dropped from heaven, fraught with legalism and guilt. In our pragmatic, relativistic era, we must tailor-make our ethic as each circumstance determines—always being guided by love in this trial-and-error process.[2] Though it resembles relativism, it does espouse the standard of "love" to follow.

For example, consider this situation: Your mother is dying a slow death by cancer. What should you do? Don't say, "You shall not murder." That's

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legalism. What would love do in that situation? Perhaps it would be loving to end her life. Or, perhaps a frustrated single longs for companionship and sexual fulfillment. You are married, but you can provide what she "needs." Don't say, "The Bible says you shall not commit adultery." That's legalism. What would love do? So there is no set of rules. You must decide yourself as you face each decision: What would love do?

As we have seen, love sums up and fulfills the law (Mt 22:34-40; Rom 13:10). Yet situation ethics is problematic for a number of reasons—including those given in response to relativism. First, like the bumper sticker "Question authority," situation ethics lacks any objective authority for its position. Why prefer *love* rather than *reason* or *pleasure* or *survival*? Anyone can assert a claim, but what is its justification? Situation ethics turns out to be purely arbitrary. Second, "love" is contentless and pliable and thus becomes a vague and meaningless ideal. Legal expert and theologian John Warwick Montgomery presents us with a scenario. In making his case for situation ethics, Fletcher could not say there is anything wrong with all manner of misinformation and twisting of the facts—so long as this is done in the name of love:

> But wait! Should he assure us, by swearing on his mother's grave . . . that he will tell us the truth no matter what, can we even then relax our vigilance? After all, that very assurance may well be a situationally justified prevarication for the sake of "doing us good in love" by convincing us of the merits of situationalism. . . . If a situation ethicist, holding to the proposition that the end justifies the means, in love tells you that he is not lying, can you believe him?[3]

By divorcing love from law and command, the situationist empties it of concrete meaning. Acting in "love" may actually bring harm to us and our neighbor because we ignore God's just commands (1 Jn 5:2-4).

Third, biblical commands to love are not the only commands. They are the most important, to be sure, but are not contradictory or preemptive of God's other commands. We are not given a choice among his commands. Ultimately, situation ethics ignores the very nature of an intrinsically good God, whose commands should direct humans so that they may function according to their God-given design.

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The Social Contract: An Agreed-on Morality

Some suggest that morality is simply the result of people agreeing together not to harm each other—the "why can't we all just get along?" morality. The reason something is "wrong" or "right" is because of consensus—what a group of people agree to. The philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) believed that prior to this agreement, humans live in a "state of nature." Life in that state turns out to be "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short." So humans get together and agree to live by a set of rules that profit everyone—a social contract. They appoint a sovereign, whom Hobbes ominously named "Leviathan"—to whom we all must thereafter submit in order to preserve the social order.

Following in his wake was John Locke (1632–1704), who influenced the shaping of the US Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. Now, he did not believe that morality was just a matter of contracts; in fact, he believed that human beings have intrinsic dignity and worth because they are the "workmanship" of God. Other social contract theorists such as John Rawls (1921–2002) claimed that agreement must be based on rules that any rational person would agree to if she were to switch places with anyone else in society ("What if I had a different skin color, religion, sex, ethnic background?"). In doing so, no one is automatically placed at a disadvantage.

For those who believe that morality is *nothing more than* a social contract—the result of people agreeing not to hurt each other or steal from each other—there are problems. This social contract-equals-morality view can't serve as the foundation of morality for several reasons. First is the *consent problem:* What if a person refuses to live by the contract or refuses to "sign on"? Morality wouldn't be binding on that person since he refuses to go along with it. And what if my ancestors entered into a social compact but I wasn't on hand to agree to it? Am I really bound by a contract someone *else* made without my consent? Is it truly a contract *for me*?

Second is the *arbitrariness problem: Declaring* something good or agreeing that it's good doesn't *make* it good. Nazis had an agreed-on vision for a "good society," but it was morally twisted. A Mafia ring may require a prospective member to murder someone before joining. The Mafia may

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approve, but we still know it's immoral *apart from* any social contract. It would be utterly intolerable to equate the "legal" and the "moral" since this would justify the actions of Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot and Mao Tse-Tung.

Then there's the *pragmatism problem:* If one can escape the consequences of violating a social contract, why consider doing so immoral? Drug lords will break social conventions and taboos to protect their drug shipments and cash flow? If you can escape the consequences, why is it wrong?

Fourth, there is the *metaphysical problem.* Metaphysics is the study of ultimate reality—does God exist? What about the soul, life after death, free will? People will bring different metaphysical positions to the table, and these are not morally neutral. The late John Rawls, for example, took for granted that abortion was morally permissible, disregarding the intrinsic value of unborn human life. Surely his view cannot be a *just* social contract theory on the matter of the unborn. Furthermore, he still assumed intrinsic human dignity for all rational persons, but this view of human worth itself is more plausibly rooted in the image of God, not in some naturalistic view of the universe.

The social contract view reminds us that in democracies, principled persuasion aiming at a greater consensus is important. Without patient persuasion of hearts and minds, laws thrust on the majority opposing them will only create a backlash and ill-will. While a well-crafted social contract (as in the U.S.) may function as a helpful guide, it cannot serve as an actual foundation for morality or a ground for human value. Something deeper is needed.

Utilitarianism: Morality Based on Consequences

According to the utilitarian, whatever brings the "greatest happiness" to the most people is "good." The *outcome* or *consequences* are more important than the *means* of getting there. The *quantitative* utilitarian Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) insisted that an act is good if it produces maximum pleasure and minimum pain, and he even offered a way to calculate pleasurable outcomes. By contrast, John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) was a *qualitative* utilitarian who emphasized *deeper* pleasures to pursue. The consequence of enjoying fine literature, art and music isn't immediate. It takes time, patience, self-discipline and postponing gratification. Now, there have been

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Christian utilitarians; they considered *God* as the being who brought the greatest good to as many of his image bearers as possible.[4] However, most contemporary utilitarians have a secular or naturalistic outlook. And when God is excluded from the picture, difficulties quickly surface.

Consider Princeton's Peter Singer, the world's most notable utilitarian, who is utterly hostile to a biblical ethical perspective. He claims it is ethically permissible to abort unborn children with Down syndrome and to euthanize handicapped infants or the elderly suffering from dementia. He *did,* however, make an exception for his own mother, Cora, whom Singer refused to euthanize while she lived with dementia.[5] In general, however, Singer targets those who can't hit back, as someone aptly put it.

Where does utilitarianism lead? Consider the post-impressionistic painter Paul Gauguin (1848–1903), who abandoned his wife and children in Europe and headed off to Tahiti. There he pursued his "dream" by enjoying ocean breezes and sandy beaches and by painting tropical scenes and topless women. Perhaps the utilitarian might say that because of the sorrow he caused his family (the consequences), this act was wrong. But others might argue, on aesthetic grounds, that Gauguin's art has brought more benefit to humanity than harm to his family. So his action was good.[6]

Utilitarianism *does* correctly emphasize that we cannot separate ethical choices or actions from their consequences. As Jesus said, "You will recognize them by their fruits" (Mt 7:16 ESV). For ancient Israel, rewards or blessings (consequences) were the promised outcome of obedience—and curses for disobedience (Deut 28). Consequences are one factor in ethical decision making, but certainly not the only one.

While secularized utlitiarianism has shades and nuances, we can register the following complaints against it.[7] First, if an *act* or *rule/principle* is not inherently good (or bad), then how would one know whether the *end* or *goal* is good? It seems we must know what is *intrinsically* good to capably judge whether its *consequences* are good. Second, how can we measure the well-being of *society* without considering the well-being of *individuals*? We can't separate the two—much like we can't separate the building up of the body of Christ without the use of individuals' spiritual gifts being exercised (1 Cor 12).

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Third, utilitarianism wrongly assumes that individual human beings don't have intrinsic value and that what matters is what they contribute to society's overall well-being. So why not sacrifice some "for the good of the cause"? What if a group of Nobel Prize winners were in need of organs from transplants in order to survive? One needs a heart, another a kidney, another a set of lungs, and so forth. These scientists and economists, we could well assume, could do much good for society. Now what if there is a street person—a drifter without family or prospects for improving his life? Maybe his organs could be harvested to help many more people? Given the assumptions of utilitarianism, what would be wrong with bringing benefit and happiness to a number of lives by sacrificing one (potentially wasted) life? Or what would be wrong with finding a scapegoat to help rally a society's economic recovery? For example, a Nazi government could blame Jews for Germany's economic decline, and this could help contribute to a new national self-confidence.

In such cases, we should dispense with the *theory* of utilitarianism—not our basic moral *intuitions.* We know humans have dignity and worth apart from any consideration of social consequences. Because of their *essence* or *nature,* they have dignity and worth independent of the arbitrary "personhood criteria" laid down by various utilitarians, such as self-awareness, rationality, intelligence, social abilities or "contribution to society." So to assume that humans are just a means to societal ends is unwarranted and dangerous.

Another way in which utilitarianism defies common sense is that it *ignores motives* and focuses only on consequences. But surely this can't be right. Two acts can be *identical*—two people giving a gift to their grandmother, for example. And the outcome can be the same—Grandma is very happy. But the motives may be starkly different: one grandchild gives a gift because she loves her grandmother and the other does so only because he wants to have his name in her will. Motives can be evil or good, regardless of the outcome, and we judge acts to be good or evil partly because of the motives.

Here is a further problem with utilitarianism: it tends to eliminate the natural importance of family loyalties and deep friendships in favor of a level playing field for all humanity. The utilitarian William Godwin (1756–

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1836) wrote that if he had to choose between saving a maid and the French benefactor and Archbishop of Cambrai, François Fénelon (1651–1750), he would save the archbishop because of his value to society. When asked if the maid were his grandmother, he said he would still save the archbishop![8] But it is utterly counterintuitive to treat family and friends on par with everyone else. Paul says that even unbelievers know that they ought to take care of their own family members (1 Tim 5:8). Are we obligated to care for other children more than our own simply because they have a greater need than our own children do? If the utilitarian's version of "doing the right thing" requires us to treat those who are special to us as though they were not, then we should reject this moral outlook.

Moral relativism, social contract theory, and utilitarianism make a contribution to the moral discussion, but by themselves, they are inadequate to account for human dignity and objective moral values and duties. In the next chapter, we look at other ethical outlooks and alternatives.

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11

The Duty Ethic, Evolutionary Ethics, and God as the Foundation for Morality

Kant and the Ethic of Duty

When describing influences and trends in modern philosophy, the textbooks commonly divide the "pre-Kantian" from the "post-Kantian." The towering philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) has profoundly influenced philosophical thought—and ethical theory as well. So we should at least make some brief comments about his views.

Kant strongly emphasized "duty." In ethics, this is called "deontology"—from the Greek word *deon*, meaning "obligation" or "duty." Kant's view was something like the Stoic, who emphasized gritting your teeth and doing your duty without regard to emotion or circumstances. Kant argued that there's nothing praiseworthy if you *feel* like doing the right thing; if we do what we do because we feel like it, why is that praiseworthy?

Although Kant believed in the existence of God (in some form) to make sense of morality, many secularists appeal to Kant as offering an ethical system that can do just fine without appealing to God. Of course, this perspective correctly emphasizes the importance of doing one's duty and the dignity of human beings as moral agents. The problem, however, is that it's not enough to simply *assert* that humans have dignity and worth. *Why* do humans have dignity and worth? How does such worth emerge from worthless material processes? Here the naturalist must borrow concepts

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of value from theism—the assumption of human dignity (like "the image of God"), moral responsibility/free will and even duty itself. Why think that valuable, duty-bound, morally responsible beings should emerge from valueless, deterministic, material processes? A secular Kantian has no answer to this.

Second, Kant emphasizes *duty* but fails to emphasize the value of *character*—the setting from which moral choices flow. Humans can develop in their character so that certain choices become "second nature." That is why we correct our children—to train them so that doing the right thing will become a habit and even a joy.

Third, like Inspector Javert in *Les Misérables,* who said, "There is no God. There is only the law," a person may do his duty and "follow the rules" but be an utterly humorless, disagreeable individual who lives a very morally sterile life. Surely something is wrong with this picture!

Fourth, Kant's system takes an absolutist view in places where an ethical ordering or hierarchy is important. As we observe in this book, Scripture recognizes ethical tensions and offers a more richly textured ethic than Kant's flattened, duty-centered ethic.

Finally, Kant's system is highly depersonalized, focusing on what a "rational" agent ought to do. Though important, this is still a far cry from the ultimate personal duty to love God and others: "Owe no one anything, except to love one another" (Rom 13:8 RSV).

Evolution, Ethics and God

Another dominant view—sometimes connected to utilitarianism—is the view of evolutionary ethics: our ethical beliefs have developed through evolution to help us survive and reproduce. Some evolutionary ethicists emphasize that we *think* we have duties; however, there is no *real* moral obligation behind those beliefs. Without a strong moral impulse to, say, "love little children," we would disregard this notion; the result is that we would diminish our chances of survival.[1] Atheist Michael Ruse claims that our sense of duty and of right and wrong is only of "biological worth."[2] Morality is a *corporate illusion* "fobbed off on us by our genes to get us to cooperate."[3] We don't have real duties, only the *illusion* of them.

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There are several problems with this way of thinking. For one thing, even if our fundamental moral understanding *were* influenced by biological evolution, this still doesn't discount God as the source of morality. Why couldn't God engineer this process to produce in us moral beliefs or conscience that reflects God's own moral character?

Second, God makes better sense of human dignity, which we typically take for granted. We presume human dignity, worth and responsibility in our legal system. We don't escape responsibility by appealing to genetics: "Your honor, my *genes* made me do it!" Even the argument against God from evil typically takes for granted intrinsic human value ("How could a good God allow so many *innocent persons* to perish in a tsunami?"). Such common sense assumptions make better sense if human beings have been made in the image of a good God (Gen 1:26-27) than if they were the products of mindless, impersonal, valueless, material forces. If humans have a dignity that other humans should not violate, then how did this intrinsic value emerge if nature is all there is? It makes better sense to say that *value* came from *value*—not that *valuelessness* produced *value.*

Third, why trust our beliefs at all if we are just the product of those material, valueless, mindless processes? If we are simply the products of naturalistic evolution and wired for survival, then the beliefs we hold are produced by nonrational forces beyond our control. Our beliefs—including moral ones—may help us *survive,* but there's no reason to think they're *true.* In fact, we may hold many *false* beliefs that help us survive. For example, we might believe that we have *duties* to love little children or that all humans have *worth* and *rights.* These would likely enhance survival and reproduction. But since naturalistic evolution is "interested in" surviving rather than truth-seeking, holding many false beliefs could enhance survival. Why should we *trust* in beliefs produced by nonrational forces over which we have no control? How could *matter* actually *hold* any beliefs? For example, a thermometer may register at fifty-five degrees—something produced by nonrational meteorological forces—but this doesn't mean the thermometer *believes* that the temperature is fifty-five degrees, let alone *knows* it. The fact that we trust that our minds are not systematically deceiving us makes better sense if we have been designed by a truthful, rational God.

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Finally, if humans have duties or "oughts," where did these come from in a universe of electrons and self-replicating genes? How do we move from "is" to "ought"? To say that I *ought* to love children is ultimately like saying I ought to be hungry, which makes no sense. There's no difference between whether I *ought* to be moral and whether I *ought* to be hungry since both are functions of evolutionary hardwiring. These states just *are.* These drives are hardwired into us by naturalistic evolution. But C. S. Lewis noted that given such conditions, moral impulses are no more true (or false) "than a vomit or a yawn."[4] Thinking "I ought" is on the same level of "I itch."[5] Naturalism can only *describe* how humans actually do function or behave, not *prescribe* how they ought to act.

The existence of a good God changes the picture entirely. This places human dignity and duty into a sensible context; we have good reason to expect value in this universe if a good God exists. We *begin* with value (a good God) and so we *end* with value in this world (valuable human beings). There is no illogical leap from "is" to "ought" if we start with a supremely valuable God.

God and Ethics

The psalmist who looks at the starry heavens above is humbled at the greatness of God and the smallness of humanity: "What is man that You take thought of him, and the son of man that You care for him?" (Ps 8:4). Even so, God made humans "a little lower than God" (Ps 8:5)—a remarkably privileged status. The ethical theories explored in these two chapters often take for granted this assumption of human dignity; yet a Godless universe simply does not have the resources to account for important components required for the moral life—human dignity and rights, free will, reason, conscience, duty.

Though he made them from the dust, the triune God has granted his image bearers the elevated place of co-ruling creation with him as priest-kings (Gen 1:28). When we understand that a good God is our Creator and the cosmic authority and that we are co-rulers with God to care for creation and to shape culture so that fellow humans may flourish, many moral issues come into proper focus. Our basic moral awareness has a

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robust moral framework anchored in a good, loving and just God. Given this context, we have important resources for making moral judgments and living wisely in this world. The fear of the Lord is indeed the beginning of wisdom.

Up to this point, we have laid the groundwork of love, law, sin, virtue and vice; we have reviewed the current dominant ethical theories and their shortcomings; and we have noted the necessity of the triune God as the ultimate ground and standard of goodness, as the source of human dignity and worth, and as the One who not only *commands* but also gives *grace* to obey.

Now we are ready to embark on a discussion of biblical ethics. We will be using the Ten Commandments and their wide-ranging implications as a framework for our study, beginning with our duty to love God first.

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BOOK TWO

Applying the Bible to Life

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PART VI

GOD FIRST

You shall have no other gods before Me.
You shall not make for yourself an idol.
You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

For most people in the Western world the horizontal has totally eclipsed the vertical. Human relationships to each other are all-important; their relationship to God is of secondary or no importance. Even in the church, reconciling people to people, rather than reconciling people to God, has become top priority for many. Many Christians find it difficult to grasp that violating the first table of the law—the first four commands related to loving God—is more serious than violating the second table of the law—which addresses love for neighbor—although one table has implications for the other (1 Jn 4:20). We cannot understand the Old Testament's prescribed punishments for working on the sabbath, for profanity or for worshiping another deity without understanding the centrality of loving God.

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Why is the command to love God with all our being the first and greatest commandment? Why are the first four of the Ten Commandments prohibitions of sin against God? Why not put them last, after the important ones like murder and adultery? Obviously Scripture holds that sin against God is of greater seriousness than sin against others. After David had committed adultery with Bathsheba and then had her husband killed as part of his coverup, he confessed that his sin was primarily against God: "Against You, You only, I have sinned and done what is evil in Your sight" (Ps 51:4).

The triune God is the ultimate reality, the source and foundation of all other (created) reality, the integrating factor of the universe. Therefore, to be rightly aligned with him is the most important relationship in human existence. To be in right relationship with this personal reality is life itself (Jn 17:3); to be out of alignment is destruction and death. To leave God out of the equation of life or to diminish his role is like seeking to build a skyscraper without mathematics or to drive a car without fuel.

God designed us to flourish in relationship to him, and his commandments simply reinforce this reality. He treats this relationship as the most important because it *is* the most important.

Yet it is not simply a matter of reality and truth. God *cares* about this relationship. God is repeatedly called a *jealous* God. That is, it makes a difference to him whether or not we are rightly related to him. This word for jealousy in the Old Testament is the same word used when a husband is jealous—or zealous—for the affection of his wife. This is not a petty envy of legitimate competition and insecurity. It is a profound caring and total unwillingness to allow any other to replace the prior and ultimate love relationship.

The first commandment has to do with our heart attitude, our thoughts, our personal relationship with God. But God is also interested in our deeds, what we do about how we feel. Furthermore, he is concerned about our words, how we use his name, what we say about him. Some compartmentalize their lives as though God is not Lord over every facet of their existence. While claiming to be right with God, they are careless with the external manifestations of that professed heart relationship. But that God is interested in deeds and words as well as in thoughts is clearly revealed in the first three commandments.

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12

No Other Gods

Having No Other Gods

"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me" (Ex 20:2-3). A common theme running throughout Scripture is that of true worship versus the profound evil and danger of idolatry: "Keep yourselves from idols" (1 Jn 5:21). A visit to India or other non-Western countries makes this quite evident.

When I (Robertson) arrived in Japan, it grieved me deeply to see people call earnestly on gods who are not gods. But before long, I was among those who enjoyed photographing "quaint oriental customs." On one occasion an earnest Japanese Christian was giving us a guided tour of a famous shrine.

"What is your reaction to places like this?" I inquired.

"The same as all Japanese. I'm just sightseeing."

"But," I responded, "some of these people really worship these idols. What do you think about that?"

"Oh, I think it's comical, an interesting custom."

Let us remind ourselves that God does not consider the worship of false gods merely an interesting custom. Here is a sobering warning.

> If your brother, your mother's son, or your son or daughter, or the wife you cherish, or your friend who is as your own soul, entice you secretly, saying, "Let us go and serve other gods" . . . you shall not yield to him or listen to him; and your eye shall not pity him, nor shall you spare or conceal him. But you shall surely kill him; your hand shall be first against him to put him to death. (Deut 13:6-9)

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Idolatry in Israel could be compared to an act of treason—an activity that threatened the integrity of the nation as well as its God-ordained destiny.[1]

Idolatry then and now. In the ancient world, Israel had been surrounded by a culture of Canaanite deities, and God commanded his people not to worship them. Just as the apple often doesn't fall far from the tree when it comes to children imitating their parents' negative characteristics, so God knew that the Canaanites' moral and spiritual apples fell quite near to the tree of their pantheon of immoral gods and goddesses. So if one's Canaanite deities engaged in incest, then it's not surprising that incest wouldn't be treated as a serious moral wrong. Their religion also approved of adultery (temple prostitution), bestiality, homosexual acts (also temple sex) and child sacrifice (cf. Lev 18:10). The sexual acts of the gods and goddesses were imitated by the Canaanites as a kind of magical act: the more sex on the Canaanite high places, the more this would stimulate the fertility god Baal to have sex with his consort, Anat—which meant more semen (rain) produced to water the earth.

Commenting on the do-nothing idols of the nations, Psalm 115:8 tellingly says: "Those who make them will become like them, Everyone who trusts in them." What does this mean? Humans are "imaging" or "mirroring" beings, designed to reflect the likeness and glory of their Creator; so if we worship the creaturely rather than the Creator, we'll come to resemble or "image" the idols of our own devising—ones in which we place all our security and find our significance.[2] In coming to resemble finite God substitutes, we become *diminished* in our humanity.

Humans have been designed for worship, but we can easily create God-substitutes. Westerners shouldn't deceive themselves into thinking that idolatry is primitive and perhaps charming. Those who think this do not understand it. John Calvin called the human heart an idol-producing factory—a fact irrespective of West and non-West!

If we won't worship the true God, many other pseudo-gods will fill the vacuum. Idolatry is essentially placing ultimate value on what is finite and thereby incapable of yielding true satisfaction and contentment. It can also involve *false ideas* that diminish the character and authority of God in our lives and enable us to manipulate the gods of our own choosing to do our

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bidding. Idolatry is a *false worldview* or a *philosophy of life.* A worldview isn't simply a set of intellectual beliefs; rather, it is a *heart commitment,* and it can squeeze God out in the name of science or philosophy or religion. Or perhaps the pursuit of knowledge becomes an all-consuming *intellectualism,* which leads to pride and alienates others.[3] *Doctrinal rigidity* and *theological precision* can lead to arrogance; we exhibit idolatry when we feel superior to other Christians who think differently: "Lord, I thank you that I am not an Arminian"—or "a Calvinist" or "a Pentecostal." Idolatry can be an all-encompassing *attitude* or *mindset.* In our hurt, we choose the path of anger and resentment; it becomes our focus and idol, and we become bitter as a result. We become like the choices we make. Hence, true worship must be in spirit and *truth* (Jn 4:24).

We are all in danger of daily idolatries. To make something central in life, the pivot or ultimate reference point, is to "have a god." To yield ultimate allegiance to or to consider someone or something as the ultimate happiness or most desirable object, even to fear above all else is to "have a god." It is worshiping and serving the creature rather than the Creator (Rom 1:25). And this ultimately diminishes our lives and true well-being.

Notice that the first commandment does not expressly say no other gods exist. But that need not disturb us since the rest of Scripture clearly teaches monotheism—that there are no other gods in reality; there is only one God. There is no god besides the Creator of the worlds and the Lord of Israel (Deut 6:4; 32:39; Is 45:6). Other deities exist only in name—so-called gods and lords; in fact, there is "no God but one" (1 Cor 8:4-6).

In the ancient Near East, gods operated in community—in a pantheon, a divine assembly or with a consort. By contrast, the biblical God works alone and doesn't share his power or glory with another.[4] The first commandment prohibits having other gods *before* the true God. It is quite legitimate to have other loves, loyalties and ambitions. But none of these loves and loyalties can come before God, or else we have broken the ultimate relationship and violated the supreme commandment. It is not those who love their father, mother, son or daughter who are unworthy of the Lord Jesus, but those who love someone else *more* than him (Mt 10:37). There can be no competing "ultimates" with God—whether

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money, possessions, a friend, a mate, a child, a parent, love of country, a hero or leader, a philosophy or ideology; all of these can be idols, the self being the most common.

Thus, in the act of true worship of the living God, we renounce all competitors and substitutes. In fact, the act of genuine praise to God is *polemical*; to praise God is to repudiate "alternative loyalties and false definitions of reality."[5]

Pastor Tim Keller refers to idolatry as turning God's good gifts into God-substitutes—that is, *making good things into ultimate things.* In light of this, he advises Christians not to simply "scold" relativists for inferior moral standards or mushy views of truth. Premarital sex and sexual lust, say, are wrong, but these "bad things" are symptoms of something deeper:

> Instead of telling them they are sinning because they are sleeping with their girlfriends or boyfriends, I tell them that they are sinning because they are looking to their romances to give their lives meaning, to justify and save them, to give them what they should be looking for from God. This idolatry leads to anxiety, obsessiveness, envy, and resentment. I have found that when you describe their lives in terms of idolatry, postmodern people do not give much resistance. Then Christ and his salvation can be presented not (at this point) so much as their only hope for forgiveness, but as their only hope for freedom.[6]

Furthermore, one's trust and obedience, allegiance or love may be quite legitimate and never demand a special, conscious evaluation until the loves or loyalties come into conflict. Then one's god stands revealed. At the point of choice, which love or loyalty we put before the other will determine who or what our true god is. "What is an idol?" Keller asks. "It is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give."[7] And this is how you can tell you have an idol: "A counterfeit god is anything so central and essential to your life that, should you lose it, your life would feel hardly worth living."[8]

God speaks of Israel's idolatry as a forsaking of God, "the fountain of living waters," and carving out for themselves broken cisterns that can hold no water (Jer 2:15). This is the fate of those who trust in God-substitutes.

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As Augustine reminds us, "You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their peace in you."[9]

Idolatry and the occult. What about the occult? What does this have to do with idolatry? The occult, including witchcraft, astrology, channeling and fortunetelling, has made a strong comeback in the Western world. Satan worship is obviously the most hideous of all idolatry, and all idolatry is, in a sense, the worship of demons (1 Cor 10:20). But what of palm reading, crystal-ball gazing, discernment of the future through tea leaves, astrology, Ouija boards? Deuteronomy 18:9-12 refers to "detestable things" and forbids there to be among Israel "anyone who . . . uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead."

God repeatedly forbade all varieties of the occult (Lev 19:26, 28, 31; 20:6) and hated this kind of activity so much that he made death the penalty for practicing it (Lev 20:27); in fact, he judged Israel by means of deportation and captivity for allowing it (2 Kings 17:17-18; 2 Chron 33:6). That all forms of the occult are wicked and hated by God is clear enough, but are they a violation of the first commandment against worshiping other gods?

Isaiah seemed to pinpoint the evil in consulting fortunetellers as seeking from other sources that which should be sought only from God (Is 8:19). In other words, disclosing the future or supernaturally affecting the future is the prerogative of God, and when usurped by false prophets, demons, fortunetellers, astrologers, mediums or anyone else, the person has attempted to be godlike, mimicking the Almighty (cf. Is 45:20-21). Those who consult them have given to humans or Satan the confidence and obedience due God alone. Consider Saul's experience with a medium in 1 Samuel 28 after God refused to speak to him or guide him.

Does the growing influence of occult practices indicate some measure of success in predicting or manipulating future events? How can these activities be successful? In the case of Saul, God himself must have intervened in the mysterious appearance of the dead prophet—for judgment, to be sure! Often it is clearly the supernatural work of unclean spirits (Acts 16:16), and sometimes it is trickery and deceit (Acts 13:10). Occult activity

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was a constant plague not only in Israel but also in the early church as these enemies of the gospel confronted Paul wherever he went. Today also, the plague is universal and calls down the judgment of a God who will have no other gods before him.

The first commandment reminds us of where our proper orientation must be—focused on the ultimate reality, rejecting all God-substitutes. Doing so results in our flourishing, since we have been intentionally designed to worship and serve our Creator and Redeemer. By contrast, idolatry corrupts us and further defaces the divine image. The second commandment, too, forbids distortion of the divine by attempting to capture or even manipulate the divine in physical form as we engage in worship and devotion.

In many countries the entire culture is saturated with religious practices. Even cultural festivals have religious overtones. When is it legitimate for Christians to participate in such activities? It is not enough to say that Christian are free to participate if they themselves have no religious feeling in the matter (2 Cor 6:14-18). In the evolution of a culture, religious ceremonies and particularly festivals tend, like our Christmas, to become secular. In the light of the first commandment, Christians may not participate simply because the activity has no religious connotation for them. They may participate only when others see in their participation no endorsement of the religious element. For example, though Christmas may have strong religious meaning for the Christian, it has become so secularized that no one would think a Jewish merchant had compromised his faith by having carols broadcast in his store in December or wishing people "Merry Christmas." Or, despite its darker origins, Halloween in American culture has come to be religiously neutral, and it can be an enjoyable time of treat-gathering and spending time with neighbors. My (Paul's) wife and I would have our children focus on wholesome fun and avoid costumes and themes with a dark and macabre emphasis.

Christians living in another religious culture must be careful not to misrepresent the gospel message or mislead others by using of images or engaging in certain potentially compromising actions. "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 Jn 5:21 ESV).

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Not Making and Worshiping Images

"You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God" (Ex 20:4-5 RSV).

Images in the ancient Near East. In the ancient Near East, images of invisible deities served as a depiction or an embodiment of those gods; images were believed to *mediate* a deity's *presence* and *power.* Image use was an attempt to unite the transcendent and the immanent—the otherworldly and the this-worldly.[10] Scripture never tires of contrasting the gods who cannot see or hear or save with the Creator God of wisdom, power and saving grace. The prophet Jeremiah gives a stinging contrast in pointing out the utter foolishness of worshiping such idols (Jer 10:1-16), and both Isaiah (Is 44; 45:20-22; 46:1-7) and Habakkuk (Hab 2:18-20) make the same devastating contrast. John returns to the same theme in Revelation 9:20.

The psalmist eloquently exposes the foolishness of worshiping images:

> Why should the nations say,
> "Where, now, is their God?"
> But our God is in the heavens;
> He does whatever He pleases.
> Their idols are silver and gold,
> The work of man's hands.
> They have mouths, but they cannot speak;
> They have eyes, but they cannot see;
> They have ears, but they cannot hear;
> They have noses, but they cannot smell;
> They have hands, but they cannot feel;
> They have feet, but they cannot walk;
> They cannot make a sound with their throat.
> Those who make them will become like them,
> Everyone who trusts in them. (Ps 115:2-8)

We see here the enormity of betraying the living God—a constant theme throughout Scripture. Also the inherent evil of idolatry is pointed out: humanity makes gods in its own image, as we have seen, and they in

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turn make the worshiper into the image of the idol (Ps 115:8; 135:18)! Likewise, Jeremiah refers to Judah's running after *vanity* and becoming *vain* (Jer 2:5).

In the ancient Near East, deities were cared for by their worshipers, who attended to their images. These gods—in the physical form of images—would be awakened, fed, washed and put to bed at day's end. In doing so, worshipers would guarantee the ongoing presence of the deity in their midst.

By contrast, the Lord would manifest his glory or presence in the tabernacle and temple, but an important difference is that these objects did not mediate the divine presence. The original thrust of this prohibition had to do with representations or objects that attempted to mediate the presence of deity.[11] There can be a broader application of the second commandment, however. One problem with images used in worship is that they distort and misrepresent the nature of the one true God. For example, the golden calf Aaron crafted was an attempted representation of the God who "brought you up from the land of Egypt." An altar was built before it, and Aaron proclaimed: "Tomorrow shall be a feast *to the LORD*" (Ex 32:4-5). No doubt, the idolatrous Israelites craved some tangible mediation of the presence of the Lord, but beyond this, such physical representations are limited in what they can express about God, and this distorts one's understanding of the divine nature. The bronze serpent that Moses used would later become an idol in the land (2 Kings 18:4). This object became more than a memorial of God's deliverance in the wilderness (Num 21:9), but something to mediate the presence of the supernatural or transcendent realm.

Art, image worship or aids to devotion? The prohibition of graven images does not prohibit works of art, as some hold. We know this because in the same Sinaitic commandments there are instructions for "fashioning" the cherubim and the pomegranates for the robe of the high priest. Later Moses was to erect the bronze serpent. The command is against creating any object for *religious veneration rather than, say, creating objects for religious instruction or religious art.*

The Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches have held that images of God, Jesus or the saints are quite legitimate as *aids* to worship, so

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long as they are not used as *objects* of worship. But aids to worship can easily become objects of worship and distort and misrepresent the one true God. Catholics have distinguished between *veneration* and *worship,* the latter being offered only to God. However, the danger is that these distinctions can be dissolved in actual practice. Among Protestants it is common to have paintings or other visible depictions of Christ—some of us remember the flannel graph Bible stories of yesteryear—or even representations of God the Father, but there is no use of these objects for worship; so they can hardly be considered in violation of the second commandment, particularly if that commandment in its original context had to do with images mediating the power and presence of the divine. We ourselves personally prefer to be without the artist's imagination of our Lord's appearance, but we find no prohibition of this in Scripture.

In various cultures or settings, images of Jesus may cause offense to other believers in South America or Southeast Asia or even unbelievers, say, in a Muslim culture. And graven images of another kind can be a cause of spiritual harm to others. As a new missionary I (Robertson) asked an older Japanese pastor if there was a problem with displaying a photograph of my deceased father. He gently advised against it. In a land where such photographs are objects of veneration in ancestor worship, a perfectly innocent custom becomes a stumbling block. It is far better to err on the side of caution than to risk promoting violation of the second commandment.

If a person does not actually worship an image but simply uses it as an aid to devotion, why should it be prohibited? History teaches that such "aids" can actually become *objects* of worship. This was true when the brazen serpent was destroyed because it had become an object of worship (2 Kings 18:4). This is also true in Roman Catholic countries where official church theology insists that the image is *not* to be worshiped, but the common people do in fact pray to and venerate the image itself. Even if a person might use the image solely as an aid to prayer to the invisible God, she may well lead others into actual worship of it. In medieval Catholicism, the relics of the saints were viewed by many as having magical qualities and detracted from worshiping the one true God. In any event, the making of graven images of this kind is prohibited in the second commandment.

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What of those who go through the form of worshiping before an idol or image but in their own hearts pray to the true God? In times of persecution is it better to go through the formality of idol worship to preserve one's life in order to live and serve the true God? If God does not accept us when our worship is mere form and not in truth, why should he condemn us if we go through the formality of worshiping some other god but do not do so in truth?

The Bible is very clear on this point. We are not only forbidden to make such objects of worship, we are commanded not to bow down to them. It is unacceptable to God to worship him with the aid of images, which are *limiting* in what they can depict about God or Christ and thus distorting true worship. Some missionaries have kept fetishes and idols as curios or instructional material. But God says that the idol must be destroyed (Deut 7:5-11, 25-26). Why does God take this hard line on idols?

In the first place, to go through a form that is not true is to lie. But it is not an ordinary lie. It is a particularly pernicious lie because it is the lie of betrayal. "But whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven" (Mt 10:33 ESV). Peter may have denied the Lord with very good motives. He may have been attempting to save himself so that he could rescue his master from impending execution. Whatever his motivation, it was the act of unfaithfulness that broke his heart.

A couple in Japan was at the point of divorce when God rescued them and their home by his grace through Christ Jesus. Unknown to me (Robertson) or to the young wife, the husband did not destroy the photographs of the other woman, but put them in the bottom of a bureau drawer. Many months later, his wife discovered these photographs and in anger cut them to pieces. This made her husband so angry that the home was on the verge of breaking again. He said that the relationship with the other woman had been broken off, that there was no continuing contact of any kind, and that the pictures meant nothing. It is very hard for an outsider, let alone a wife, to believe that the pictures meant nothing when the husband took scissors and shredded his wife's clothes in retaliation. Somehow there is unfaithfulness even though it is merely an outward form. God is a jealous God and will not countenance any competition for first place in our lives or the

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appearance of it. Not only is making gods forbidden; the act of "bowing down to them" is strictly prohibited as well.

Further Reading

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13

Honoring God in Speech and Rest

Not Taking God's Name in Vain

"You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain" (Ex 20:7).

In an ancient Near Eastern setting, the third commandment would have been understood as a prohibition against misusing God's name in an attempt to *manipulate* or *harness his power* for one's own selfish purposes. The "name" of a given pagan deity was frequently invoked as a technique—a magical incantation—to master supernatural forces to pursue earthly or material success. This third command prohibits the use of the name of Yahweh ("the LORD") in magic.[1]

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus reminds us of the sacredness of God's name: "hallowed be Your name" (Mt 6:9). In her *Magnificat,* Mary affirms this: "holy is His name" (Lk 1:49). Jesus prays to his Father to "glorify Your name" (Jn 12:28). The seven sons of Sceva misused the name of Jesus in this way—a "magical" name to exert power over demonic forces (Acts 19:14). To those who merely used Jesus' name to cast out demons, perform miracles, or prophesy, he tells them, "I never knew you. Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness" (Mt 7:23).

A further application involves using God's name to make and then break a contract. It is wrong to invoke the name of God to validate the truthfulness of one's statement when it is actually untrue. It is wrong to call God as witness to a contract, to make a vow before him, and then to break contract or vow. This is the way the third commandment is referenced in

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Scripture (Lev 19:12; Mt 5:33-34, 37; 23:16-22; 26:63). And James 5:12 prohibits the using of an oath in any event.

Christians, by the very name they bear, have validation enough for every statement they make. Their word should be trustworthy. Their yes or no is sufficient without qualification. In the home, parents' yes to their children should be sufficient without having to tack on an "I promise" to ensure that they really mean what they say. A simple "I will" should suffice. And character matters more than technique. For Christians to break contract or to tell a lie is to break the third commandment, for it is to use profanely the name of God which they bear, whether or not they actually invoke the name. Though breaking a contract given in God's name is the primary focus of the third commandment, there are other implications.

Did Jesus and James forbid all oath taking? Some have held that it is wrong to take an oath in court or to swear allegiance to one's nation. The first problem with this view is that the Israelites were commanded to swear by the name of their God (Deut 6:13; 10:20), and it was considered praiseworthy (Ps 63:11). In line with this, Paul often said, "For God is my witness" and at least once took an oath (Rom 1:9; 1 Thess 2:5, 10). God himself takes oaths and swears by his own name (e.g., Heb 6:13-20). Christ spoke under oath in court (Mt 26:63). How is this apparent conflict to be resolved? Most branches of the church have held that Christ and James are reinforcing the teaching originally intended to prohibit oath breaking, not oath taking. James is expounding on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5–7), and Jesus and thus James are opposing verbal casuistry—an ancient version of crossing one's fingers when taking an oath. Jesus opposed the common abuse of oaths in his day—that somehow one was bound by swearing by the gold of the temple or by one's offering, but not if one swore by the temple itself or the altar in the temple (Mt 23:16-22). Jesus was outraged by this hypocrisy, insisting that one should be a person of one's word.

Of course the scope of the prohibition was broader than just the breaking of a formal oath. In the first place, a covenant people (Ex 19:5-6; 1 Pet 2:5, 9) are name-bearers of God, and, by virtue of that, every word they speak must be trustworthy, every act in conformity with the covenant or oath of allegiance they have sworn to God. The employee who does not give a full

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measure of faithful work and the employer who does not pay a fair wage are both profaning the name of God, for stealing profanes his name (Prov 30:8-9). In fact, every sin is the occasion for God's name to be blasphemed among the unbelievers (Rom 2:24-25). Who has broken the solemn vow of marriage through adultery or unlawful divorce? The Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain. Who has broken the solemn pledge given at baptism? The Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

Sometimes it seems impossible to live up to the promises made, for every promise, even every yes and no of a Christian, is given in God's presence. He is witness. Difficult to be sure, but God approves of the person who sticks to his word no matter how costly (Ps 15:4). God favors the bankrupt businessman who spends his life attempting to repay his creditors. Unshakable integrity is the key idea in the third commandment and in the reinforcement given by Christ and James.

In the second place, the custom of invoking God's name to induce confidence in what one says ("I swear to God") had become so commonplace as to empty it of meaning. They were literally "taking God's name in vain." Today people use God's name without meaning it—mindlessly profaning God's holy name—whether just using the common abbreviation "OMG" or simply a habit of speaking that reveals an impoverished vocabulary. Even preachers use God's name flippantly, in a casual way, or in quoting a profane person. Against this both Jesus Christ and his brother James spoke stern words of warning.

Is this the only prohibition of the third commandment? Literally, to "take in vain" means to use in an empty way. Therefore, to use God's name without meaning it is to use it profanely. In a sense, to pray or to sing without meaning it is to use God's name in vain. The great temptation of those in full-time Christian work is to do religious activity professionally, simply to go through the routine of "performing" a church service. And much contemporary "praise band" worship in our churches looks more like a rock concert of performers with a weak congregational accompaniment—rather than a community of worshipers robustly joining together in one voice to adore God. These are yet other ways to profane the name of God.

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Certainly any sort of irreverence violates the third commandment. To joke about sacred things or to joke with sacred things in such a way as to debase them is to act profanely. To use sacred things or words emptied of sacred meaning is wrong. For this reason, jokes about the Bible or sacred Bible truths are not fitting for the Christian who holds God's name and God's things in high reverence.

Some people seem to use God's name in vain by repeating it often in prayer without thought. Others invoke God's name on almost every decision or plan they make. "God said" or "God told me to . . ." God's name is invoked to validate almost every activity. This may be genuine so far as a person's heart condition is concerned, but there is the danger that this may become profane, invoking God's name when it is not altogether certain that God himself stands behind that particular choice or activity.

What of words that are often called profanity, such as *hell* or *damn,* or scatological or sexual terms? Technically speaking, these are not a violation of the third commandment. The third commandment prohibits taking *God's* name in vain. This does not mean that a Christian is free to use such language, of course. There are other biblical injunctions concerning what we should think about, or not letting any unwholesome word proceed from our mouths (Eph 4:29), and certainly much of this language is not fit for Christian use.

What of Christian novelists or dramatists putting profanity in the speech of their characters? This is becoming increasingly common. This, however, is one of the great—and perhaps fatal—limitations on Christian writers. We see no more justification for them to use profanity for their characters than for ministers to use similar language in their pulpit illustrations. How can Christian novelists say, as many do, "That's just my *character* speaking"? Inasmuch as they have full control over their character and the language and thought that the character brings into my mind, we don't see how they are free of responsibility. Unlike sins such as murder, which a person can describe without committing, to use words profanely is to commit the sin—God's name is no less used in vain by putting it in quotes.

What of minced oaths like "gosh" or "gee"? Do these violate the third

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commandment? Sensitive Christians need to be especially careful that they do not judge others too severely in these matters. Some of these oaths have no religious association in their culture—much like how "goodbye" is no longer understood to mean "God be with you." In all conversation, though, believers ought to honor and hallow the most sacred name of God.

What of humorous language? Christ says that we must give account for every idle word that we speak (Mt 12:36). Ephesians 5:4 seems to prohibit levity of any kind, but this has more to do with what we might call dirty jokes or impure speech (cf. Eph 4:29). And we should be on guard against the increased coarsening of our culture and vulgarizing of speech.

Now, it can hardly be sinful to speak with a humorous touch since Christ himself did so on more than one occasion. When he nicknamed James and John the "Sons of Thunder," it can hardly be understood as a dead-serious speech. A log in one's eye and a camel crawling through a needle's eye are not solemn illustrations. The name Isaac ("he laughs") is a reminder of divinely created ironies to humble—and even humor—humans trying to figure out God's ways! The Lord's delivering his people from captivity fills their mouths with laughter (Ps 126:2). A cheerful heart—and no doubt this includes humor—is good medicine and brightens the face (Prov 15:13; 17:22). Those who weep for their sin will be comforted, even laugh (Mt 5:4; Lk 6:21). Actually, humor can be anything but idle. It can be very productive—often to break the tension or to build relational bridges.

Sometimes a light, humorous touch can counteract a heavy-handed approach in order to get a point across—or humor can be an indirect way to address a problem whereas a direct confrontation could create further tensions. Standards for humor should be maintained. For example, humor should not hurt another person. While humor is not in itself sinful, it can turn to idle, unproductive foolishness. Does humor spring from love in a spirit of reverence for God?

For the people of God, words have a sacramental character. Jesus is the living Word of God. The Scriptures are the written Word of God. Our mandate is to speak and live out the Word reverently and consistently—as living letters for the world to read (2 Cor 3:2; cf. Jn 13:35). The third com-

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mandment charges believers—avowed name-bearers of God (Jas 2:7)—never to profane the name in word or behavior.

Observing the Holy Rest Day

"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. . . . The LORD blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it" (Ex 20:8, 11 RSV).

There is some disagreement between scholars about the enduring relevance of the sabbath commandment for the believer. Is the *seventh* day (Saturday) to be the Christian's day of rest, as Seventh Day Adventists hold? Or is the first day of the week—or the Lord's Day (the day of Christ's resurrection)—the Christian's sabbath? Or has the sabbath been fulfilled in the person and work of Christ so that it is no longer obligatory and no day is more special or set apart than the rest—even if the rhythm of rest and corporate worship is still vital for our overall well-being? If the sabbath or Lord's Day is not binding on Christians, does this mean that only nine of the ten commands have enduring relevance? Does the New Testament itself set limits regarding the rest day? Is the fourth commandment a matter of "Christian liberty" in the new covenant era? Indeed, we authors hold differing views on this matter. As we discuss this below, we will highlight similarities and differences.

The rest day in the Old Testament. The Hebrew word *Sabbath (šabbāt)* means "rest" or "rest day." When did a special rest day begin? For whom was it intended? What was its purpose?[2]

"And by the seventh day God completed His work which He had done; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it; because in it He rested from all His work which He had created and made" (Gen 2:2-3).

The command to rest on the sabbath is unique in ancient Near Eastern literature. As John Walton notes: "It is now widely acknowledged that no such observance has been found" outside of Israel's legislation.[3] In contrast to the non-Israelite literature, the Old Testament depicts humans working to sustain themselves—rather than to help meet God's needs or to do God's work while he relaxes. Humans rest in light of the fact that God has exerted control and has established order in the cosmos.[4] Although God

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brings about the material creation (Gen 1:1; Jn 1:1-3), God is primarily putting in order a cosmic temple—a divine-human meeting place; on the first three days of "dividing" he forms or puts into place "realms" or "spheres," and in the next three days he "fills" or populates those realms. He puts all of this in order so that he and his image bearers can work together in tending to it and can enjoy fellowship with each other in the garden sanctuary (Gen 3:8).

God then *ceases* from the work of his initial creation. But this rest is not because of some desire or need in himself. God's "rest" is *symbolic,* serving as a model for human beings. Surely God didn't literally need to feel "refreshed" (Ex 31:17)! God considered the human need for rest in the midst of life's rhythms, so he set a pattern himself at creation. God set aside a day for Old Testament Israel primarily to allow his people to be refreshed after six days of labor, typically from sunup to sundown in the ancient world; this was a gift of love and a sign of divine care. God graciously purposes to have us as partners in his creative and redemptive *work.*

The original purpose of the sabbath was human *rest.* Later, the Scriptures make a connection to *proper worship* and *service of others;* God desired that Israel's sabbath include assisting the hungry and the afflicted (Is 58:9, 13-14). Sabbath worship was not to be separated from relationship with God and serving his people.

Beyond this, we view the sabbath question differently.

Biblical evidence: McQuilkin's perspective. The rest day began at the creation. The purpose stated is clear: it is for rest, and it is in a special sense holy or set apart, rooted in the example of God at the very beginning, long before any covenant of redemption was made with a chosen people.

When God commanded sabbath rest a second time, the rest day was designated as a sign for Israel of God's great redemption from Egypt (Deut 5:15). But it did not originate then any more than animal sacrifice, which was also designated as a sign of God's redemption from Egypt, originated at the time of the Passover. Sacrifices were offered up to God before the time of Abraham—just as circumcision was likely in existence before Abraham's day. Likewise, the rest day was to be a covenant sign between God and Israel (Ex 31:13), but this does not mean that the rest day was instituted then.

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When God gave the Ten Commandments, he clearly enunciated the origin of this particular commandment. "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. . . . For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it" (Ex 20:8, 11 RSV). Some have said that there is significance in the fact that the setting apart of the rest day in Genesis 2 is never mentioned again until Exodus 16:26-30—in connection with the (still pre-Sinai) giving of the manna. However, there can be no more significance in this omission than there is in the omission of the other nine commandments during the same period of time. The fourth commandment was enunciated at the very beginning.

Christ's view of the rest day. Jesus Christ, who came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets (Mt 5:17) said both yes and no to sabbath regulations. Christ said yes to the rest day—and a resounding no to the rabbinical additions. Jesus certainly sought to portray the full significance of the sabbath command. In his discussions of the sabbath, he contended with the scribes continuously over their interpretation of the law, with the complex hedge they built about the law to protect it. In fact, Jesus seemed to deliberately instigate controversy by repeatedly healing on the sabbath.

In his practice, Jesus observed the sabbath. The rest day was made for humans; *so* the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath (Mk 2:28). Contrary to what some scholars have maintained, "Son of Man" is not a reference to humans (as implied by this name given to Ezekiel, which denoted human frailty). The parallel to this passage in Matthew 12 indicates that this "Son of Man" and "lord of the sabbath" is also "greater than the temple." This is Daniel 7's authoritative "Son of Man," who is coregent with the Ancient of Days—the same title that prompted the high priest to tear his robes at Jesus' trial (Mk 14:62-64).

What does it mean for Christ to be "lord of the sabbath"? First, we know that Christ did not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it (Mt 5:17-19). Jesus' "fulfilling the law" included his *obeying the law*—though opposing mere rabbinical tradition. That said, sabbath synagogue (or even temple) attendance was not a requirement of the law, but Jesus set the sabbath pattern for this.

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The rest day as a special day is somewhat similar to nighttime. Humans need several hours of rest every night. Most normal, healthy people are delighted that they can go to bed and rest at night. They don't feel it is something laid on them that is very hard to do. Even so, some things must be done at night, and in an emergency a person may skip the rest time. In a similar way, Christ allowed for exceptions: grinding grain informally and thus preparing necessary food to eat (Mk 2:23-27); watering cattle (Lk 13:15); commanding a man to pick up his bed and take it home (Jn 5:8). Opposed to legalism, Christ allowed not merely for "works of *necessity*" on the sabbath. Christ emphasized what brought genuine benefit to humans—"works of *mercy*" (Mt 12:11; Lk 14:5)—as opposed to the stifling, dry legalism that hurt people. No wonder Christ was angry with religious leaders who thought he should not heal on the sabbath (Mk 3:1-5). In addition, leaders of God's people will be involved on the sabbath in service to God, which enabled others to engage in their rest and worship of God (Mt 12:5; Jn 7:22-23).

Second, Jesus fulfills the Old Testament as Messiah and is the one who faithfully lived out Israel's story in obedience to God. He brings to fruition the Old Testament's events, ceremonies, personages (like Moses, David, Solomon and Jonah) and holy places (e.g., Jn 4:21-24). As for the sabbath, Jesus' life and teaching draw out the full significance of the sabbath. And Jesus' example supports the view that obedience to the fourth commandment is still obligatory. The difference is that Jesus merely strips the command of all its scribal additions and human-made traditions.

Paul's view of the rest day. Paul taught his Gentile churches that the Hebrew Scriptures are God's Word and that the law is summed up in the command, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Gal 5:14). The only Bible these Christians had was the Old Testament, though the sayings of Christ and the early biographies of Christ were no doubt beginning to circulate (e.g., Lk 1:1-2; Acts 20:35). The writings of Paul are identified by Peter as Scripture and thus hold equal authority with the rest (2 Pet 3:16). In fact, we believe that God's revelation progressed in the person, work and the teaching of Jesus Christ and that it progressed even further in the interpretation of the person, work and teaching of Jesus found in the apostolic letters. Nevertheless, if the authority of Scripture is to remain intact, every

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effort must be made to harmonize the teachings of Scripture. Later revelation is authoritative in interpreting earlier revelation. However, unless later revelation (in Jesus Christ or in the apostles) clearly sets aside or reinterprets earlier revelation, the earlier revelation must stand.

Paul considered Jesus to be the fulfillment of the Old Testament, and so he interpreted it christocentrically. The authoritative Christ was the touchstone for whether a Mosaic command had enduring relevance or not. Yet Paul tells his Gentile audience at Colossae: "Let no one pass judgment on you . . . with regard to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath" (Col 2:16 RSV). To the Romans he writes, "One man esteems one day as better than another, while another man esteems all days alike. Let every one be fully convinced in his own mind" (Rom 14:5 RSV). The question then is this: Is Paul, in Romans and Colossians, deliberately setting aside the sabbath commands of Genesis 2 and Exodus 20? Paul's intention is not to diminish the authority of any of the Ten Commandments.

Taking the Lord's Day as the Christian sabbath, Paul Jewett argues that if no days are different, then why does Paul highlight the first day of the week for breaking bread (Acts 20:7) and for setting aside monies toward an offering for the poor saints in Jerusalem (1 Cor 16:2-3). And what about John's reference to "the Lord's day" (Rev 1:10)? Jewett adds:

> To what, then, did [Paul] have reference when he spoke of some who esteem one day above another and some who esteem every day alike? We cannot be absolutely sure. Since the context has to do with dietary restrictions, some have thought he is speaking of setting aside certain days for fasting. Recalling that the church of Rome had a large Jewish contingent, it is at least equally plausible that he had in mind the Jewish Sabbaths and other holy days, which the Jewish Christians were at liberty to esteem and the Gentile Christians to ignore, according to each man's background and personal preference. It apparently never occurred to him that anyone would construe his strictures against the legalistic observance of feast days, new moons, and Sabbaths (Col. 2:16) or his plea for liberty in the estimation of days (Rom. 14:5) as meaning he was opposed to the observance of a weekly division of time, or indifferent to the designation of the first day of the week as the day of religious worship.[5]

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The Letter to the Hebrews on the rest day. The teaching of Hebrews (Heb 3:7–4:11) was taken by the Reformers as indicating that Christ fulfilled the sabbath law so that we have all entered into our rest from sin, and thus all days are to be treated in an equal way. Other scholars argue that an even stronger teaching in the passage is clearly that a rest remains for the people of God. We have the *already* of Christ's bringing us rest in the present, but Hebrews emphasizes the *not yet* final rest as well. The new heavens and new earth (cf. Rev 21) is the focal point of the passage.

It might also be urged that simply because all of one's property belongs to God, there is no longer any need to give a portion for his offering. Again, to argue that to be saved is to rest in Christ and that therefore the older commandment of physical rest is abrogated would be like arguing that since our eternal and true marriage relationship is with Christ beginning now and confirmed in greater fulfillment at the marriage supper of the Lamb, therefore the physical and contemporary laws of marriage are no longer in effect.

Summary of the biblical evidence. Though there are arguments on both sides of the sabbath continuity-discontinuity discussion, the sabbath rest day was clearly established for humanity by God at creation, and it was to be an example for all humans to follow. National Israel was expected to follow God's example and command before and after Sinai. In the New Testament, Jesus attended synagogue on the sabbath. After Jesus' resurrection on the first day of the week, the early church, including Paul's example in Acts, would gather on "the Lord's Day"; this appears to reinforce the binding nature of a set-aside day, albeit not the seventh day, Saturday (the sabbath). Any opposition Paul had to setting days aside pertains to Jewish legalism rather than the spirit of the fourth commandment. To do otherwise would be to undermine the authority of the Decalogue and the example of Jesus.

Furthermore, church history strongly supports such a view. Before the Edict of Constantine that restored property and religious rights to Christians (A.D. 313), believers by necessity worked on the Lord's Day. However, Constantine set aside the first day of the week as a day of rest from work. Why should Constantine choose Sunday as a rest day if

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there was no precedent among the Christians with whom he sought to identify? After Constantine's edict, the church fathers began to appeal to the law of the sabbath as applying to the first day of the week. This interpretation became common throughout Christendom until the time of the Reformers. The Reformers rejected this interpretation, holding that the sabbath law was no longer binding for the Christian. Nevertheless, each Reformer in his own way defended the observance of the day in practice. This is reinforced by the affirmation of worship and rest in various Protestant catechisms and confessions—Westminster, Augsburg, Heidelberg, Belgic, Scots—which all highlight the normative role of all the Ten Commandments.

Biblical evidence: Copan's perspective. While Western Christians may emphasize the *first* part of the sabbath command to "remember the Sabbath," yet *another* command follows: "Six days you shall labor and do all your work" (Ex 20:9). We are far removed from ancient Israel's *six* twelve-hour workdays, but it appears—at least on the face of it—that we are required to work six rather than five days. How do we square this with the common forty-hour (five-day) workweek to which Westerners are accustomed? The question is worth pondering as it relates to the purpose of the sabbath command.

Strong arguments can be made for the enduring nature of the sabbath because it is anchored in creation—well before the Mosaic law was given. The sabbath command is to be "a perpetual covenant" and "a sign . . . forever" (Ex 20:8-11; 31:12-17). On the other hand, one could argue that other "eternal" Old Testament ordinances would be fulfilled in Christ: Passover (Ex 12:24: "forever"), the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Ex 12:14, 17: "an eternal ordinance"); burning oil in the temple (Ex 27:21; Lev 24:3: "a perpetual statute"); the Aaronic priesthood (Ex 29:9: "a perpetual statute); food to be given to Aaron and his sons (Ex 29:27-28: "forever"); grain offering (Lev 6:22: "a permanent ordinance"); the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:31: "a permanent statute"); one statute for Israelite and alien (Num 15:15: "a perpetual statute"); tassels on garments (Num 15:38: "throughout their generations"). Of course, the fact that these ordinances are fulfilled in Christ does not mean that the sabbath is fulfilled in Christ. However, these

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other ordinances could serve as a picture of how the sabbath could also find fulfillment in Christ.

Christ's view of the rest day. Biblical scholars observe that Jesus himself, in following his Father's example of working, works on the sabbath—his favorite day to heal the sick! "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working" (Jn 5:17). Rather than easily waiting an additional day to heal, he intentionally heals ("works") on the sabbath; he makes no attempt to avoid any appearance of wrongdoing. In fact, in his healing of the blind man in John 9, Jesus technically does "work" by making a mud pack to put on this man's eyes—an additional bit of "work" he could have avoided on the sabbath (Jn 9:6). So, certain scholars argue, if Jesus is "lord of the sabbath," perhaps he is signaling a new way of viewing the sabbath—that the ultimate *rest* is to be found in coming to Christ and in our taking his yoke upon us (Mt 11:28-29).

Paul's view of the rest day. Those claiming that the sabbath rest has been fulfilled in Christ will readily agree that Paul well knew that the weekly sabbath goes back to creation. Yet he also knew that the fourth command *specifically designates* the sabbath day: it is the *seventh* day—not merely *one day* in seven (e.g., Sunday/the Lord's Day).

Yet in Colossians 2:16-17, Paul makes the strong statement that the weekly *sabbath,* which is included in a list of other Jewish festivals (held monthly and annually), was itself a "shadow of what is to come." Given this passage, various scholars argue, it would seem hard to believe that Paul is upholding sabbath-keeping here. The same downplaying of *any* days is found in Galatians 4:10: "You observe days and months and seasons and years." Scholars taking the "Christ fulfills the sabbath view" see that Paul, in light of his mission to the Gentiles, refuses to insist on sabbath-keeping and that he does not mandate setting one day apart as more theologically significant than another.

In Romans 14, Paul is addressing a Gentile church with a Jewish minority. Here Paul is referring to two matters: eating (or abstaining) from certain foods and setting days apart (or treating them all alike). Scholars generally agree that Jewish and Gentile scruples are at issue here. The *diets* mentioned—as well as the *days*—are not strictly Jewish, but include, for

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example, Greco-Roman holy days. It seems Paul is treating *both* diet and days as nonmoral matters—issues concerning liberty of conscience.[6]

If so, does this mean that the fourth commandment is "abolished" or "abrogated"? No, scholars such as D. A. Carson, Douglas Moo and Craig Blomberg would argue.[7] Jesus himself said he came to *fulfill* the Law and the Prophets, not to abolish them. Rather, Christ takes into himself the Old Testament's laws and reinterprets them for the new community of disciples in light of his life, death and resurrection—including Gentiles being incorporated into the people of God. But Christ's fulfilling does not mean that Old Testament laws necessarily have the same normative *authority* for Christians that they did for Old Testament Israel.

The Letter to the Hebrews on the rest day. The "rest" in Hebrews is not a literal sabbath observance; the rest in Hebrews has to do with "a lifetime of perseverance in trusting in Christ, which will then eventuate in an eternity of rest from our labors."[8] This is much like Revelation 14:13—the dead who die in the Lord and who "rest from their labor"—and the rest Jesus himself promises to the weary and burdened who put their trust in him (Mt 11:28-30). This is a more robust perspective on rest—namely, resting in Christ and remaining devoted to him—than resting one day in seven. So Hebrews does not shed light clearly on the Lord's Day question.

Summary of the biblical evidence. Christ's fulfillment of the sabbath is suggested by the various ways he emphasized the non-binding nature of the sabbath. He did so by stressing his own (and his Father's) working on this day (Jn 5); he highlights his lordship over it, which, like David's taking the showbread from the priest at Nob (Mt 12; cf. 1 Sam. 21), allows for exceptions. And are Christians not allowed to do the equivalent of gathering firewood on the sabbath—say, pumping gas, perhaps—as in Num 15:32-36? In Romans, Galatians and especially Colossians, Paul extends this point by emphasizing that no particular day should be imposed on Gentile believers—especially since sabbath-keeping was a point of national pride for Israel. Furthermore, while nine of the commandments are repeated in the New Testament in various lists (e.g., Mt 19:17; 1 Tim 1:8-10), the fourth commandment is not included.

Moreover, these scholars would claim that New Testament evidence of

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a theological transfer from a seventh day (sabbath) to the Lord's Day is not so clear. Further, that it became the early church's official day of worship is not so evident. These scholars would say that the Old Testament sabbath is bound up with *rest,* but not the "Lord's Day," which in some instances is connected to *corporate meeting,* which includes teaching and fellowship. No doubt, the earliest Gentile Christians in the Roman Empire would have had to work on Sundays—hence meeting on Sunday evening in Troas (Acts 20:7-11). They would have had to work every day of the week, and they would only get rest on whatever Roman holidays their pagan peers did.

Application for today: McQuilkin's perspective. The rest day is commanded in the Scriptures—not merely that it is a beneficial thing and one of God's good gifts for the welfare of humankind. Some scholars argue that it is a law rather than a recommendation because a recommendation would be no blessing at all. It is the binding aspect of the rest day that releases one for rest and worship. If the rest day is merely recommended, we are not free to rest from the pressures of life and turn without hindrance to joyful fellowship with God and his people. We must still face the pressures and frustrations of mundane obligations. But a required rest day sets us free for worship, community, reflection and refreshment. Yet one must be careful about being a "sabbatarian" who promotes the kind of legalism that Jesus himself would have opposed.

Christians commonly applaud an athlete like Eric Liddell, who out of spiritual conviction, refused to participate in a race in the 1924 Olympics because it was scheduled on the sabbath. (The film *Chariots of Fire* powerfully portrays the strength of this man's inner convictions.) Christians frequently commend the Chick-fil-A restaurant chain for closing its doors on Sundays to provide a day of rest and refreshment for its employees; this also makes a countercultural statement about the importance of rest and renewal, not to mention the necessity of regularly gathering together as God's people. Such examples are in keeping with the spirit of the fourth commandment, which is rooted in God's rest at creation.

Application for today: Copan's perspective. Scholars taking the "Christ fulfills the sabbath" perspective would certainly advocate the need for rest

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and for physical and spiritual renewal—but they would say that this is not restricted to the Lord's Day. And, they would add, no believer should abandon Christian fellowship (Heb 10:25). Yet *how often* believers should meet is not commanded—though we see that New Testament believers gather even *daily* (Acts 2:46), not just weekly.

Craig Blomberg advises that if Christ fulfills the sabbath and thus is no longer binding on believers, then believers should perhaps reconsider what worship and rest involve in our modern society; this includes how churches can more effectively minister to their members as well as reach unbelievers with the gospel. If we only offer church services on Sunday mornings at 11:00, we may be missing opportunities to reach people who might be interested in attending a Saturday or Sunday evening gathering as well (i.e., multiple services). This might accommodate not only seekers, but Christians within our churches who may have difficult work schedules as, say, flight attendants, security guards, doctors and nurses, or other professions with odd schedules. And what of believers who regularly go to restaurants after Sunday services, pick up last-minute groceries for Sunday dinner, fill their gas tanks for a Sunday drive, watch football games, or travel back on Sunday evening from a weekend business trip? Whatever view we may take about the sabbath/Lord's Day issue, all of us are grateful that many in society do not take the Lord's Day off, as the rest of us can benefit from their services. And we hope they find rest and refreshment on other days.

Blomberg advises that, for the sake of the gospel, churches seek to minister to an increasingly secular society. With the diminishing of the Judeo-Christian influence in society, new challenges face our church. This situation in society, he says,

> would require our churches having numerous opportunities for worship and more employers than now do recognizing the need for flex hours and schedules and limits on the amount of time people can work each week and still remain healthy. But these trends do already seem to be developing. Rather than decrying the disappearance of an era that will never return . . . , let's see how creative we can become in helping people celebrate multiple mini-Sabbaths every week, and recognize their entire Christian lives as Sabbaths in the [New Testament] sense, in ways appropriate to the twenty-first century![9]

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Summary

We have explored the importance of the "God first" commands, which articulate different ways to love the Lord our God with heart, soul, mind and strength. To fear the Lord—that is, to submit to his authority and to enter into covenant and relationship with him—is the beginning of wisdom.

From here we move to the second table of the Ten Commandments which instruct us on how to love our neighbor as ourselves, beginning with marriage and family. The home is where love is to be learned and refined in the thus-and-so-ness of everyday life. Ideally, family relationships that live out love, forbearance, reconciliation, forgiveness and joy help prepare us for neighbor-love outside the home.

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PART VII

SEX, MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

Honor your father and your mother.

You shall not commit adultery.

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14

Foundational Considerations on Sexuality and the Purposes of Marriage

God, the Divine Image, and Human Sexuality

God's standards on human sexuality are treated in Scripture as the most important ones for relations among people. In the Old Testament, teaching against adultery is emphasized second only to teaching against idolatry. In the New Testament, both Christ and the apostles emphasized the vital importance of marital fidelity. Paul includes sexual sins in every one of his many vice lists, and in most cases they head the list and receive the greatest emphasis. Why does the Bible view this relationship between the sexes as so important?

Sexual fidelity, more than most virtues, clearly demonstrates the purpose of law: human welfare. Human sexuality is one of God's most delightful gifts. But the sordid record of human history and the anguish of personal experience highlight the basic reality that this joy is reserved for those who "follow the manufacturer's instructions."

This outcome is not surprising because human nature was designed to reflect divine nature, and God's law is simply his expressed will that people conform to the moral nature of God and that their character be shaped into that of the ultimate human, Jesus Christ—the very image of God.

The image of God is connected to the God-given task to human beings to carry out their function as priest-kings in this world—to love and worship God and to rule and care for creation and culture: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and

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female he created them" (Gen 1:27 RSV). In order to carry out their task, humans have been granted the ability to reason, to create, to love and be loved, to communicate, to know God, to make responsible choices and to live lives of fidelity and purity.

We should avoid the mistaken notion that Genesis 1 defines "image" as what characterizes "male" and "female." Rather, God created humans to resemble him in certain limited ways, and he created humans in two different models: male and female. Both male and female have the capacity to share equally in the love and relationality of the divine family—the Trinity. So we should be careful about saying that aspects of male and female are found within the Godhead, since *animals* and even some *plants* are male and female.

Furthermore, we should reject the notion that God is male. Rather, God is a *sexless* being. However, this does not justify generic reference to God as "our Parent in heaven" or as "Father and Mother" with Jesus being the "child of God." John Stott notes that we do not have the liberty to change the biblical text in even more gender-neutral translations of the Bible. This would set aside the very foundations of Scripture's trinitarian language—that God is "Abba, Father" and that Jesus is his "beloved Son" and the "Son of God."[1] Scripture asserts that God *is* Father, but he acts *as* a caring, nurturing mother toward his people (Deut 32:18; Ps 131; Is 42:14; 49:15; 66:13; cf. Mt 23:37; Lk 15:8-10).

In a representational way, we are biblically warranted (Gen 1; Eph 5) in viewing maleness and femaleness and their relationship as reflecting God's own mysterious relational nature. Inasmuch as the relational Trinity is one, yet three, and the three are cemented in a relationship of loving commitment, we can see in the Godhead the ideal model for biblical marriage. The pervasive Old Testament representation of God as the husband and Israel the wife, and the New Testament representation of Christ as the bridegroom and the church the bride, are more than felicitous analogies; they are a self-revelation of God to explain in human terms through a figure or "picture" what deep personal and spiritual relationships are designed to be. Human marriage seems designed deliberately to reflect the eternal reality of the best of all relationships—that of

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the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, primarily, and of God's covenant relationship with us.

If Scripture's discussion of marriage reflects God's own qualities expressly revealed for humanity's best interests, why are these standards the most often violated? Does anything demonstrate more clearly humanity's arrogant, foolish, perverse, blind and demonic fallenness?

Before considering the biblical purposes of marriage, we must consider the topic of biology, male-female identity and equality, as well as singleness.

Male and Female: Biology and Identity

The most obvious distinction between male and female is *biological.* Some say it is the only distinction and that other distinctions are constructed by society—except perhaps those bearing directly on biological functions necessary to fathering and mothering (perhaps "inseminating" and "childbearing" would be more accurate descriptions). By contrast, the Scriptures reject a "unisex" view that totally blends or blurs all distinctions between male and female. In the Old Testament, women were to distinguish themselves from men (and vice versa) in the clothing they wore (Deut 22:5). In the New Testament, Paul observes that "nature itself" teaches us the distinction between male and female (1 Cor 11:14). Not to observe these distinctions is a dishonor. In Corinth, the length of hair expressed masculinity (shorter) and femininity (long). A unisex view of male and female is a departure from the creational order of God's making humans male and female. Indeed, it is part of God's creational order that men and women be opposite-sex attracted rather than same-sex attracted and that men and women view the opposite sex as *distinct* from them (1 Cor 11:14).

Biological differences do exist between male and female—hormones, bone density, lung capacity, the corpus callosum between the two brain hemispheres. Because of this, women tend to be more relational, comforting, sensitive and nurturing while men tend to be more aggressive, assertive, competitive and protective. But are these characteristics absolute? No. They do overlap sufficiently such that some males may be more nurturing, sensitive or relational than some females.

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In various places, Scripture assumes and suggests that certain qualities are associated with men and women, respectively: "Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong" (1 Cor 16:13); "I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one" (1 Jn 2:14); "As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you" (Is 66:13 NIV); "Jerusalem, Jerusalem . . . how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings" (Lk 13:34 NIV).

On the other hand, in Scripture we see women with strong drive and initiative (Judg 4–5; Prov 31). Believers—both men and women—are called to be strong (Eph 6:10). Both men and women are commanded to be kind and tenderhearted (Eph 4:32). This runs contrary to the teaching of influential Christian leaders such as John Eldredge (e.g., in his book *Wild at Heart*) and Mark Driscoll who emphasize how Jesus exemplified true masculinity; according to Driscoll, he was the "ultimate fighting Jesus" with "callused hands and big biceps."[2] So men in our culture should likewise lay hold of their masculinity and not be passive.

But what if a man by temperament is more focused on the artistic or musical—and so doesn't build up his calluses and biceps? Is he not truly masculine? That can't be right! Now it is true that men should not be passive—but neither should women! *All* believers should "prepare [their] mind for action" (1 Pet 1:13) and be zealous rather than slothful in serving the Lord (Rom 12:11).

Men and women alike are equally God's image bearers (Gen 1:27). Each is equally a sinner, equally under judgment, equally redeemable and equally a potential recipient of God's grace. Indeed, "in Christ Jesus" there is "no male and female" (Gal 3:28 ESV). As the archetypal human—the second Adam—Christ came to show us what true *humanity* looks like. Without diminishing maleness and femaleness and the appropriateness of distinctive sexual identities corresponding to them (1 Cor 14:11), we are primarily called as human beings to be Christlike (1 Cor 11:1; Gal 4:19; 1 Thess 1:6). A dear departed friend of ours, James ("Buck") Hatch, would say, "Men, if you come to Christ, he'll make you tenderhearted. Women, come to Christ and he'll toughen you up."[3]

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Male and Female Equality

We have seen how Genesis 1:27 makes clear male and female equality, and Galatians 3:28 views believing males and females as equals in Christ. Peter emphasizes how Christian husbands and wives in Christ are "joint heirs" (1 Pet 3:7). Paul even says that in the mutuality of marriage, the wife has authority over her husband's body—and vice versa (1 Cor 7:4).

We are familiar with the egalitarian-complementarian debate, in which there is disagreement about male-female distinctions in the home and church (more on this in chapter twenty). Whatever side one takes in the debate, it would be unwarranted to extend these distinctions to society at large regarding leadership in business, industry and government. God authorized certain women to be judges, prophetesses, teachers, and "workers" or "co-workers" in gospel ministry: Miriam (Ex 15:20; cf. Mic 6:4), Deborah (Judg 4:4), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14-20; 2 Chron 34:22-28), Noadiah (Neh 6:14), Isaiah's wife (Is 8:3), Anna (Lk 2:36-38), Philip's four daughters (Acts 21:9), Lydia (Acts 16:14-15, 40), Priscilla (Acts 18:2, 24-26; Rom 16:21; 1 Cor 16:19) and many other women (Acts 2:17-18; Rom 16:3-5, 6, 12, 13; 1 Cor 11:5).

Treating woman as inferior—as most societies throughout history have done—is clearly sinful. Male-female equality spans the Scriptures—from the original creation statement (Gen 1:27) to the fact that *all* of Israel was to be a kingdom of priests to God (Ex 19:6) to the example of Christ in his words and actions toward women (especially in Luke's Gospel) to Paul's classic affirmation (Gal 3:28) to Revelation's affirmation that all Christians are a kingdom and priests to God (Rev 1:6; 5:10). Men and women stand on level ground before the Lord. God views men and women as equals, and so must we if we are to imitate God.

Scripture enjoins us to fight for justice on behalf of the downtrodden and oppressed. Yet the record of inactivity on the part of Christian men who have allowed women to be oppressed, even when not participating in the oppression, is shameful. We could add too that many women throughout the Muslim world, for instance, experience this oppression, including female circumcision, honor killings, wife beating—as the Qur'an enjoins (4:34)—and her presumed inferior status (2:282), as well as the overall undermining of personal identity and opportunity for self-

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determination.[4] In India, over a hundred thousand young women are burned to death each year in "kitchen fires."[5] On the other hand, the strident, angry, overassertive stance of some Christian women on their own behalf does not resemble the spirit of Christ.

When God created the male, he pronounced an inadequacy, an incompleteness: "It is not good that man should be alone." So God created a partner ("helper") to complement him, to complete him (Gen 2:18). But make no mistake: the word translated "helper" (Heb *'ēzer*, Gen 2:18) is a term of strength; *God himself* is the strong "helper" of his people (Ps 10:14; 30:10; 54:4; etc.)! God created human beings for community—to reflect the image of the triune, God-in-community. And in marriage, God designed for a husband and wife to share a life partnership in all its richness and fullness.

But if God created marriage for husband and wife, does this mean that marriage is the only way for a human being to be complete? What of the unmarried person?

Singleness

Not only were Jesus and Paul unmarried. Noted Christians such as Amy Carmichael, Corrie ten Boom and John Stott were as well. Despite this, Christians commonly make one of two errors concerning singleness: that to be single is abnormal or strange, or that singleness is a more holy state than marriage.

Scripture clearly teaches that obedient believers who are single can find higher fulfillment in their relationship with God (1 Cor 7). Christ also taught that some people have the ability to remain single for the sake of God's kingdom (Mt 19:10-12). If a person does not have this gift, Paul's instructions are clear that they should marry (1 Cor 7:2). If circumstances impose singleness, one should ask in faith for the ability to live happily and productively in that God-ordained state. According to Paul, the advantages for those who have this gift are twofold: a more exclusive and wholehearted relationship with the Lord and the potential of more unencumbered ministry for the Lord.

How does a person tell if he "has the gift"? Paul tells us one evidence of

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lacking this ability: burning with lust (1 Cor 7:8-9). If desire for sexual fulfillment is so strong that one is caused to sin because of it, one does not have the gift, at least not as yet. Paul also speaks more generally of "the man . . . who is under no compulsion but has control over his own will" (1 Cor 7:37 NIV). It would seem that the unmarried person who is able to live freely without consuming thoughts of marriage or distracting preoccupation with those of the opposite sex should reflect on the possibility that God may have given him this special gift. And well-meaning Christians should not pressure such gifted persons into marriage. If one chooses to live without marriage for the higher goals Paul enunciates, such a person should ask God for this freedom of spirit and should channel her energies into service for God's kingdom. If a person does not have the ability to live "at ease" without marriage, but singleness is thrust on her by the circumstances of life, the "gift" should be sought in the same way. Moreover, churches and Christian organizations should intentionally foster fellowship opportunities for single brothers and sisters in Christ in which conversation and appropriate gestures of physical affection such as hugs—our culture's version of greeting with a "holy kiss" (Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 16:20; etc.)!—can be expressed in ways that do not sexually arouse or raise expectations of marriage.[6]

On the other hand, it is still "not good that man should be alone"; even if one does not marry, a companion or close friend of the same sex could certainly be part of God's plan (Prov 18:24; Eccles 4:7-12). Women seem better equipped to remain single than do men. For example, the suicide rate among single men is more than twice that of married people, whereas the rate among single women is little more than half that of married people.[7] The gift is certainly more easily discernible in men since the sexual urge seems innately stronger, and consequently the control of it more difficult.

That said, it would seem that the emotional drive for the security of an intimate relationship in marriage is often stronger in women. Thus, whether control is needed for the God-given physical sexual desire or the God-given emotional desire for belonging, one may have another, extraordinary gift—the ability to live in contentment without the normal provision of a marriage partner. Our sex-saturated society dismisses self-control and self-

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discipline as being out of touch with basic human drives. The New Testament's affirmation of singleness and self-control is another expression of Christ's upside-down kingdom that goes against the grain of society's priorities (cf. Lk 16:15).

Now, because of what Christ and Paul had to say about the state of singleness, and possibly because of their example as well, the teaching has arisen that marriage is somehow second-best and that singleness is a better or holier way. Actually, in church history, this teaching may have come as much from Greek Platonic dualism and Gnosticism (in which the material world is inferior and the body is the source of evil) as it did from misunderstanding Christ and Paul. Whatever its roots, the idea has come to be firmly embedded in Christian thought as can be seen in the law of celibacy for the priesthood of the Roman Catholic Church. But the Bible clearly teaches that marriage is part of God's creational order (Gen 2:18; Prov 18:22; 1 Tim 3:2; 4:1-3; 5:14; Heb 13:4) and the normal plan for his children. The idea that there is anything unclean or polluted in sexual relations in the marriage relationship is wrong—indeed a heresy ("doctrines of demons," 1 Tim 4:1-4). Let us turn then to consider the great biblical theme of marriage.

Marriage: A Personal Narrative

At the request of the editor, I (Robertson) have included a portion of a Christianity Today *article, "Muriel's Blessing," on commitment in marriage.*[8] *This later appeared in my book* A Promise Kept. *There I tell the story of my twenty-five-year journey down the darkening tunnel of Alzheimer's with my first wife, Muriel. Yet I still maintain it is nothing special. Rather, it was my high privilege to watch over my beloved when she could no longer watch over herself.*

> The five-column headline read: "Love Helps Alzheimer's Victims Survive, Study Says." The reporter wrote: "What's love got to do with it? Just about everything, says a researcher who studied what happens in a marriage when a spouse gets Alzheimer's disease." In Prof. Lore Wright's study of 47 couples over a two-year period, she had predicted with 100 percent accuracy who would die first, based on her analysis of the love relationship between husband and wife.

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I attended a workshop in which another expert told us that there were two reasons people keep a family member at home rather than in a nursing facility: economic necessity or feelings of guilt. Afterwards I spoke with her privately, trying to elicit some other possible motive for keeping someone at home. But she insisted those were the only two motives. Finally I asked, "What about love?" "Oh," she replied, "we put that under guilt." So much for love.

What some people find so hard to understand is that loving Muriel isn't hard. They wonder about my former loves—like my work. A college freshman heard that I had resigned as president of Columbia International University to care for my wife. "Do you miss being president?" Scott asked as we sat in our little garden. I told him I'd never thought about it, but, on reflection, no. As exhilarating as my work had been, I enjoyed learning to cook and keep house. No, I'd never looked back.

But that night I did reflect on his question and turned to the Lord. "Father, I like this assignment, and I have no regrets. But if a coach puts a man on the bench, he must not want him in the game. You needn't tell me, of course, but I'd like to know—why didn't you need me in the game?"

I didn't sleep well that night and awoke contemplating the puzzle. Muriel was still mobile at that time, so we set out on our morning walk around the block. She wasn't too sure on her feet, so we went slowly and held hands as we always do. This day I heard footsteps behind me and looked back to see the familiar form of a local derelict behind us. He staggered past us, then turned and looked us up and down. "Tha's good. I likes 'at," he said. "Tha's real good. I likes it." He turned and headed back down the street, mumbling to himself over and over, "Tha's good. I likes it."

When Muriel and I reached our little garden and sat down, his words came back to me. Then the realization hit me; the Lord had spoken through an inebriated old derelict. "It is you who are whispering to my spirit, 'I likes it, tha's good,'" I said aloud. "I may be on the bench, but if you like it and say it's good, that's all that counts."

Some of my best friends don't agree. One wrote last week, "Muriel doesn't know you anymore, doesn't know anything, really, so it's time to put her in a nursing home and get on with life." That day may come—when, because of a change in my health or hers, she could be better cared for by others—but for now, she needs me, and I need her.[9]

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The Purposes of Marriage

The Bible begins with a wedding and it ends with a wedding—with the greatest love story in human literature in between. Christ performed his first miracle at a wedding, thereby sanctifying it. Yet, sadly, marriages increasingly end in failure. Some pastors testify that they have never found a truly happy marriage. Puritan philosopher-theologian Jonathan Edwards observed that he and his loving wife Sarah shared an "uncommon union"; apparently the kind of intimacy and partnership they had was not the norm in their own day. We are flooded with marriage seminars and books on marriage; counselors multiply and still cannot begin to meet the demand of people seeking help for ailing relationships in marriage. But the trouble seems to grow, not abate.

Though marriage may find substantial help through wise psychological counsel, we believe that 90 percent of the problems in marriage result directly from sin and that obedience to the plain teaching of Scripture would of itself, in most cases, produce the kind of marriage God intends.

What does God intend for marriage? Let us consider the purposes of marriage.

Relational unity or wholeness. "No man is an island," wrote John Donne. In ancient Greece, Aristotle referred to human beings as social animals. Humans were not meant to live alone, but in community; being hardwired for community is a manifestation of the image of the triune God. In contrast to Eden's animals, the male at first had no female complement. By himself as a male, he was incomplete (Gen 2:18-25; Mt 19:3-6). So the first purpose of marriage is relationship or fellowship, oneness, wholeness—love. Love in marriage means binding ourselves to another and surrendering certain freedoms of singleness. But in making such commitments and sacrifices, we find joy.

Procreation. The first man and woman were instructed to be fruitful and multiply (Gen 1:28). Animals do this too, of course, but with a major difference. Scripture gives a pattern of the home in which parents are fully responsible to care for their children. The procreation is in the context of family, according to God's pattern. The children's ditty gets the order right: "First comes love; then comes marriage; then comes baby in a baby car-

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riage." Children should spring forth from loving, committed relationship, not mere biological urges.

Many couples opt not to have children; most often the reason is human selfishness. Further, the application of the "be fruitful" command may be adapted in a world of densely populated regions, but in general, this is one divine command humankind has obeyed of late! But just as some are called to forgo marriage for the kingdom of God's sake, so some couples may be called upon to forgo or postpone parenting for the kingdom's sake. But the motives that keep couples deliberately childless must be examined. As we will note in chapter twenty, such couples bear the burden of proof in remaining childless since having children is one purpose in God's plan for normal human marriage (Ps 127:3-5). Childproofing one's marriage rather than welcoming children often reflects a self-centeredness all too common in our culture. This is a tragedy, as children help parents to become more virtuous. It's been rightly said that children raise their parents more than parents raise their children and that, in many ways, parents need children more than children need parents.

The beauty of God's plan can be seen in the exuberant joy a young child brings into the home, the strength young adults and parents provide one another, and the companionship and security children provide parents in old age, not to mention the honor rendered God through yet another generation of those who love and serve him. God's plan is good.

Demonstration of love. The marriage relationship is used throughout Scripture to instruct us concerning God's desired relationship with people (e.g., Eph 5:22-23). This is the third purpose of marriage. God is love and from the overflow of this love among Father, Son and Spirit came the creation of a being on the same pattern, designed to love and to be loved as in the divine model. A married couple should be an earthly display of the love Christ has for the church. While marriage is limited to this life, it is to be informed and shaped by unending divine love (Eph 5:1). And the more we learn of one relationship (whether the heavenly or the earthly), the more we are able to understand the other.

Let us examine in greater detail the first purpose of marriage, the unity of husband and wife.

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Excursus: Three Elements to Wholeness

As we saw, God's first purpose in marriage is loving unity or fellowship. This very positive goal of oneness or wholeness brings with it a negative aspect—*separation.* A man must *leave* his father and mother before he can adequately *cleave* to his wife in full identity of life (Gen 2:24). Scripture gives ample evidence that this separation was not essentially physical or geographical. To leave *psychologically*—that is, to change primary loyalties and to forge a life-path together as a couple—lies at the foundation of successful wholeness in marriage.

Separation also includes all other exclusive or sexually intimate relationships as well. All the subsequent laws concerning marriage emphasize God's intention that two who are joined together must have no sexual relationships of mind or body with anyone else. This negative separation lays an indispensable foundation for the three positive elements of this unity that God intended: oneness of heart and mind, oneness of body, and oneness in their relationship with God.

Oneness in heart and mind. The first positive element in oneness is not physical union, but the completing of another in deep love relationship that embraces all of life.

Even the oneness of bodies cannot be fulfilling in its most satisfying potential unless there is oneness to some degree in *spirit* as well, because sex is at root a psychological—indeed, spiritual—phenomenon. Heart unity provides the basis for experiencing the delights of physical ecstasy, but it goes far beyond the momentary physical thrill—and beyond the times of sexual engagement when one or both are not at their psychological best—by embracing a total-life commitment to pleasing the other and finding joy in this mutual satisfaction.

The biblical standard for oneness and wholeness is love, which includes sharing of interests, activities, purposes and goals. Of course, partners may have interests and activities independent of one another, but their oneness of purpose and loving identity calls for open verbal sharing of all aspects of life. Communication—an endeavor that requires a couple's constant attention—is the channel of unity. Without it, true oneness will prove elusive.

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But oneness is more than self-giving love and open communication, which can and often should characterize other human relations. These alone will not hold a marriage together for long. The "in-love" romantic euphoria of the newlywed may soon be dissipated under the impact of the harsh realities of life in which two independent beings are shut up to one another, especially when the desires of one begin to impinge on the desires or rights of the other. Communication can be a weapon to destroy unity as well as a channel in which loving unity may flow. What is the essential ingredient, then, if it is not love?

The key to a successful marriage and the cement that holds two people together for a lifetime is commitment. Ideally, this commitment springs from Christian discipleship in which two maturing, growing disciples come together as an extension of their walk with Christ and supported by the Christian community as well as family. This commitment involves the non-negotiable nurturing of an exclusive relationship and serves as the only basis for true oneness in marriage. Without this commitment to fidelity and loyalty, any relationship, no matter how loving and affectionate at the outset, is too fragile to survive. Furthermore, without this commitment, there is a tentativeness that undermines the relationship and belies the profession of love.

What makes a marriage is a mutual promise—a binding, lifelong vow. Yet today, couples often approach marriage unrealistically and along utilitarian lines; that is, they consider marriage a means to self-fulfillment: "my spouse is going to meet all my needs." No, marriage is a sign and demonstration of God's character as the great covenant-maker and covenant-keeper. In a covenant, the crucial elements are fidelity and integrity, not emotion. In marriage, it is not romantic feelings nor compatibility nor sexual adjustment that make success possible, but fidelity to one's covenant vow, with the help of God.

But oneness of spirit is not the only element of biblical unity in marriage.

Oneness in body. When God created Eve and brought her to Adam, the word was clear: The two shall be one *flesh.* This is one of the great, joyful, uninhibited themes of the Song of Songs. Furthermore, Scripture in each era teaches directly that this is the good will of God (Ex 21:10; Prov 5:15-19;

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1 Cor 7:3-5; Heb 13:4). In the union of the body the scriptural goal is clearly mutual satisfaction. No grounds in Scripture can be found for considering anything in this intimate sharing of body as perverted or wrong so long as there is mutual delight. True, a spouse should not selfishly pursue sexual pleasure at the other's expense, which violates the law of love.

However, there may be occasions when one spouse is less inclined toward sexual intimacy than the other—the "mood" may not always be "just right" for both—yet the less-inclined at the moment can still lovingly engage with the other one to bring sexual satisfaction because of the cementing or bonding that this act brings to the marriage. When a couple does not work to sustain the sexual relationship, this neglect can lead to relational fraying in other areas as well. Though perhaps a surprise to many, the Puritans emphasized the importance and blessings of the sexual relationship within marriage—a point observed by C. S. Lewis: "The conversion of courtly love into romantic monogamous love was largely the work of . . . Puritan poets."[10] For example, the Puritan William Gouge wrote that husbands and wives should have intercourse "with good will and delight, willingly, readily, and cheerfully." Puritan pastor Richard Baxter advised, "Keep your conjugal love in constant heat and vigour."[11]

Unity in God. In God's intent the relationship of husband and wife is to be completed in their oneness with God. The relationship between Adam and Eve began to deteriorate when they chose alienation from God. Perhaps their creation of clothing was the intuitive response and first evidence of this interdependence of the two relationships, horizontal between husband and wife and vertical between each and the Lord. Oneness in Christ gives depth and staying power to the human relationship.

Thus, in God's marvelous design for marriage the three unities—oneness of heart and mind, oneness of body, and oneness in God—reinforce one another in a glorious spiral upward toward the fulfillment of God's purpose in marriage.

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15

Violations of God's Purposes Within Marriage

Since God planned marriage to be so good, he has, not surprisingly, created safeguards for his people to preserve its goodness. These are necessary because there are many enemies of God's good plan, many ways of abusing human sexuality that subvert and destroy the purposes he had in mind. Not surprisingly, sexuality and idolatry are often intertwined in Scripture.[1]

Marriage to an Unbeliever

The first purpose of marriage is loving companionship—the unity of two in a relationship mirroring the nature of God himself as revealed in Christ (see Eph 5:22-23). One way to violate this unity from the outset is to marry an unbeliever. For the believer, Paul says, one is "free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord" (1 Cor 7:39). But marriage to an unbeliever reveals a very low view of marriage or of one's relationship to God, or both. For unity to be complete, oneness in spirit is the prime requisite—the *first* purpose of marriage. If the most important relationship in life is with God, how can a couple have unity at any real depth when one is committed to God and the other is not? The couple is working from two different blueprints for life.

Marriage to an unbeliever also puts in great jeopardy the *second* purpose—raising children in a God-fearing home: Will the children be allowed to go to church? Will the unbelieving spouse oppose Christian instruction for children and even undermine the Christian faith? Won't the

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children certainly be negatively influenced by one parent's spiritual aloofness or antagonism?

Finally, it completely rules out the *third* purpose of demonstrating the relationship God desires with his people: What of reading Scripture and praying together? What of giving financially in support of God's kingdom—or of opening up one's home to missionaries or ministry to international students? If the believing partner gives up his relationship with the Lord, some measure of unity can be built on a godless foundation as if both were unbelievers. But unless the unbeliever comes to Christ, no Christian marriage can be achieved, and no oneness at the deepest levels can be experienced.

Professing Christians who don't think sharing a common faith in marriage is a huge issue are most likely those who do not have a deep faith themselves. But it is far better to remain unmarried than to have quasi-intimacy with an unbeliever and move through life at such variance on spiritual, moral and practical matters. We can tell many stories of believers who regret having entered into spiritually mixed marriages because of the conflicts and tensions this has caused—or these professing believers have made shipwreck of their own faith because they did not hold on to a good conscience (1 Tim 1:19).

Again, the Bible expressly prohibits such a union (Deut 7:3-4; Neh 13:23-27; 1 Cor 7:39; cf. 2 Cor 6:14-18). Of course, one who is married to an unbeliever should remain married (1 Cor 7:12-13). Though union will be limited, it is better than divorce, according to Paul.

How should others relate to a Christian who is planning marriage to an unbeliever, besides prayer against the consummation of the plan and biblical counsel? Any minister of the gospel who officiates at a marriage between a believer and an unbeliever participates in the sin. Having said this, however, we should emphasize that Christian people and pastors need to relate to the Christian who is bent on unbiblical marriage so that a trusting relationship is maintained even if the advice is rejected. Because the continuance of the marriage becomes the will of God once it has been consummated, it is important for Christian people to help the Christian partner come to repentance for disobeying God, and to assist in building as true a unity as possible in the mixed marriage. Only following the ac-

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knowledgment of sin will the believing partner be in a position to "consecrate" the children (1 Cor 7:14), provide a Christlike model for the unbelieving spouse, and, hopefully, win that spouse to the Lord (1 Pet 3:1-4).

Marriage has enough challenges as it is, but a mixed spiritual marriage generally brings with it sorrow, regret, marital conflict and spiritual compromise in one form or another.

Adultery

The most serious violation of marriage is adultery—an activity excoriated in the Scriptures, second only to idolatry. Infidelity, though commonplace in most societies, has had few advocates in Western society until recently. But now adultery is promoted by popular media and naturalistic scientists and philosophers. Apparently, males in particular are biologically "wired" for sexual promiscuity—and not for lifelong monogamous commitment.[2] Of course, this view commits the is-ought (or "naturalistic") fallacy: if that's how males *are,* then that's how they *ought* to be. But why not argue this way for rape? A biologist and an anthropologist attempted to give evidence for the biological basis for rape: males who can't find a mate rape women because of a subconscious drive to survive and reproduce. But should this alleged fact in the animal kingdom ("is") become normalized or even obligatory behavior for humans ("ought")?[3] After all, we come into the world with a self-centered tendency ("is"); should we simply affirm and normalize this ("ought")? No, we should instead resist this impulse.

The biblical prohibition against adultery is a protective measure, the violation of which brings destruction. Fidelity in marriage promotes the well-being of all in the family: it preserves the integrity of the couple and maximizes the enjoyment of sex itself; it protects the more vulnerable wife; it creates a wholesome atmosphere for bringing up children who learn to put honor and faithfulness ahead of pleasure and instant gratification; and it honors God, who himself exhibits faithfulness to his people. Adultery is ultimately a violation against God himself (Gen 39:9; Ps 51:4; Amos 2:7).

Adultery does massive damage to marriage—a relationship that is to be loving, permanent, exclusive, secure and intimate. In the wake of adultery, trust can never be quite the same again; a third party will often intrude on

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the intimacy, in the mind of one partner or both. True unity is fractured. So devastating is adultery to marriage that Christ permits the innocent party to divorce (Mt 5:32).

What's more, adultery does not suddenly happen. It begins *in the mind.* It begins with dwelling on lustful thoughts, then fantasizing, then lowering one's sexual guard with others, engaging in emotional affairs and going beyond (see our discussion of sexual lust below). While some claim that a variety of sexual partners intensifies sexual pleasure, the purported thrill—the "passing pleasures of sin" (Heb 11:25)—proves to be hollow. Such pursuits reduce a person to "a loaf of bread" (Prov 6:26). And why think monogamy should be reduced to monotony? What of spouses showing romantic creativity and surprise, of taking time to cultivate sexual intimacy, and simply sharing life as best friends?

Furthermore, fidelity in marriage provides special protection for the most vulnerable partner, the wife. She is more vulnerable for the following reasons. First, her deepest drive is not for physical sex so much as for belonging. When she shares her body in the secure bonds of permanent belonging, she is satisfied. But when the belonging is illusory or temporary or uncertain, she suffers loss at the deepest level, a loss that most men do not even understand, let alone experience. Second, if the physical relationship is paramount, she can only "compete" for a few years. The male in our society does not suffer the same fate as the female. Advertising, the media and cultural mores seem to dictate that a woman is physically attractive in direct proportion to her youth. Yet a true marriage focuses on oneness of heart, and in the realm of the spirit both partners have the potential of growing more and more beautiful throughout the years (Prov 31:30). When this is the basis, a woman grows in her sexual desirability through the years because that desirability is set in the context of total unity, loving giving of life, a lifetime of fully shared experience. The third area of greater vulnerability is suggested by the fact that men remarry at a rate far surpassing that of women—often because women are likely caring for their children. For this reason, a broken marriage very often means acute loneliness for the ex-wife that the ex-husband may not experience. And the woman left with children following a broken marriage becomes

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financially vulnerable, as the statistics bear out.[4] Even though women's liberation pressed for both sexual freedom and equality, they are intrinsically opposed to each other since risk and responsibility fall naturally—biologically—on the woman more than the man.[5]

Excursus: The Question of Interracial Marriage

Some have held that interracial marriage is prohibited in Scripture, but a careful reading of the texts will indicate that it was not Jewish-Gentile marriage as a racial mix (for many of the surrounding peoples were of the same "race"), but believer-unbeliever marriage that God prohibited. It was not the foreignness of Solomon's wives, but their foreign religions that led him astray.

Some have held that Paul's word about God setting "bounds of habitation" was an indication that God intended races to remain separate geographically and thus maintain their racial purity. Therefore, by implication, God is against intermarriage. That can hardly be considered responsible exegesis, but this is the key New Testament passage for the teaching that racial intermarriage is wrong. In the first place, Paul's intent was the very opposite. He was speaking to the leaders of a people ("nation") who considered themselves different in origin and vastly superior to all others, whom they classified as barbarians. Paul tells these Greeks that the God who created them is the Creator of the entire human race, which has a common origin "from one blood" (Acts 17:26 NIV).

But some say that Paul alludes here to Moses' hymn in which he uses similar terminology (Deut 32:8). This is not much help to the position, however, because Moses is simply praising God for setting limits for the surrounding nations to provide a place for Israel. We see Moses himself marrying a Cushite—an "interracial marriage" opposed by Aaron and Miriam but vindicated by God (Num 12).

While kosher laws, clothing laws, and planting laws in Israel were to remind these people about their set-apart status from the rest of the nations, this was not a prohibition against marriage to (believing) non-Israelites. Indeed, the Scriptures matter-of-factly, even positively, mention the incorporation of foreigners into the nation—the "mixed multitude" coming out of Egypt, Moses' Cushite wife, Rahab, Ruth, Uriah the Hittite

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and others. And in the church at Antioch (Acts 13:1), we have testimony of multiethnic ministry leadership—with the likes of Paul (Saul) himself with Barnabas alongside Lucius from Cyrene (Lybia today) and Simeon, who was called Niger (he was black).

On the pastoral side, it should probably be added as a footnote that crosscultural marriages involving radically distinct cultures are notoriously hazardous because of the natural challenges in marriage itself compounded by crosscultural conflict. (Note that this is distinct from cross-racial marriages within the same culture or within similar cultures.) Those contemplating such a union should be made aware of the additional handicaps involved, for unity is much more difficult to achieve with one of another culture. Another major problem is the link with family each partner brings into the marriage. In some societies, children of mixed marriages may suffer. So while certain crosscultural marriages may not be advisable, they certainly cannot be held unethical on biblical grounds.

Polygamy

It is more typically the female who desires a caring, intimate, secure relationship, and males have tended to be more detached and less sexually discriminating than their female counterparts. And throughout history, this has included the tendency toward polygamy in some societies. Social factors also have contributed to polygamous arrangements. In societies where females far outnumber males (because of war, hunting or other dangerous male activities) and the female is an economic benefit, polygamy has prevailed. But when male and female are in equal supply and the maintenance of a wife is an expense, monogamy prevails. For example, in the time of Christ, during the *Pax Romana* (Roman peace), monogamy was the custom for Greek, Roman and Hebrew people.

According to some biblical scholars, monogamy is viewed as the ideal marital arrangement for humankind, but they state that the Bible nowhere directly condemns polygamy and nowhere directly affirms monogamy as the only legitimate arrangement. Furthermore, polygamy is definitely not viewed in Scripture as sexual impurity. Marriage to a second partner was to be as indissoluble as to the first. Infidelity was the result of breaking that

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relationship or defrauding one of the wives, not of having the relationship and faithfully adhering to marriage vows.

On the other hand, some scholars argue that polygamy is in fact prohibited by the law of Moses—even if persons like David and Solomon practiced it. Richard Davidson argues that Leviticus 18:18 prohibits taking a "rival wife": "Do not take your wife's sister [literally, 'a woman to her sister'] as a rival wife and have sexual relations with her while your wife is living."[6] For example, Elkanah took "rival wives," Hannah and Penninah (1 Sam 1:6).

Whatever approach one takes on polygamy, the Scriptures clearly illustrate how polygamy predictably leads to conflict within a household (e.g., Abraham, Jacob, David, Solomon), and thus we are right to view this arrangement negatively rather than positively or even neutrally. For one thing, it diminishes or inhibits the proper fulfillment of two becoming one flesh (Gen 2:24).

A further reinforcement of monogamy over polygamy is the teaching of Paul regarding leaders in the church. A polygamous man was not eligible for holding the office of deacon or elder in the church since he is not a "husband of one wife" (1 Tim 3:2, 12; Tit 1:6). Elders were called to exemplify the divine, creational ideal.

This "husband of one wife" passage has been variously interpreted—in large part because this is a unique term, found only in the Pastoral Epistles. Does it mean that *an elder must be married*? Likely not, since neither Paul nor Christ himself would be eligible for spiritual leadership in the church. And must one likewise insist that the elder have children (1 Tim 3:4)? Few would insist on this as a requirement. Does this mean *fidelity* or *purity*—a "one-wife-sort-of-man"? Grammatically this is not likely, and the passage seems to imply more than this. Or does this mean that *a divorced and remarried person is no longer eligible for spiritual leadership*? Some hold further—and consistently—that a person who is remarried after the death of his wife would be ineligible. But remarriage after the death of one's partner is permitted by Paul (Rom 7:2-3; 1 Cor 7:39); indeed, it is good (1 Tim 5:14). Thus, this interpretation would seem to be a strange requirement. Most likely, the passage focuses on living faithfully with one's spouse. Most

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interpreters—including the earliest commentators—have held that this passage prohibits polygamists, and this is certainly an implication of faithfulness to one spouse and moral purity. But this requirement would obviously prohibit adulterers as well as serially divorced and remarried persons from holding positions of spiritual leadership in the church.

It would be technically incorrect to say that Jesus' appeal to creation in Matthew 19 is directed against polygamy. Jesus is condemning the breaking, not so much addressing the joining. As with homosexuality, Jesus was not addressing ethical topics that were off the beaten path of his monogamous culture. If he considered polygamy a good option, he could have pleased many by proposing it as at least one solution to the problem of troubled marriages.

What does this teaching have to do with our contemporary monogamous society? Well, not all contemporary societies are monogamous. True, many of the polygamous societies of Africa, for example, are becoming monogamous because the sexes are equalizing in numbers, and extra wives have become a financial liability because of changing employment structures. But for the Christian missionary to require a polygamous truth-seeker to divorce all but his first wife in order to become a member of the church is clearly a violation of scriptural teaching. Certainly he is excluded from spiritual leadership as noted above, and it is quite legitimate to require monogamy as the standard for the yet-to-be married or those with only one wife at conversion. But to demand of the new believer that he put away one or more wives not only violates the pervasive teaching of Scripture on divorce, but causes great disruption in society and risks bringing the gospel into ill repute.

A more pressing concern for our day has to do with divorce and remarriage, to which we now turn.

Divorce

It is hard to exaggerate the evil effects of divorce on the mates involved, the children and society, as the fabric of its basic institution rips apart. No wonder God hates divorce (Mal 2:14-16).

A common, but mythical, statistic is that Christians in America divorce

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as frequently as non-Christians. This has been trotted out by well-meaning pastors to reinforce the importance of marriage—and by skeptics of religion to say that "faith" doesn't make a moral difference. While the divorce rate for the nonreligious in America is 50 percent, the divorce rate for adherents of religions is 42 percent. Six out of ten professing evangelical Christians who never attend church are divorced or separated—compared with 38 percent who attend worship weekly. Compared to secular Americans, committed evangelicals are 35 percent less likely to divorce while nominal evangelicals are 20 percent more likely to divorce. So the difference between nominal Christianity and a more serious faith that includes worship and fellowship does make a difference when it comes to divorce.[7]

However, we can only take small comfort from such divorce statistics. Divorce is wreaking havoc on our society, and the combination of individualism and pragmatism in our culture has eroded familial commitments and thus contributed to family breakdown—and thus to the proper function of society—and to diminished respect for divine and scriptural authority. C. S. Lewis described the problem in his inimitable way.

In his youth, Lewis wrote, "progressive people" considered traditionalists prudish, and they asserted that sexual impulses should be treated as any other impulse—that is, they should be freely expressed. The fact is, Lewis pointed out, no civilized person treats natural impulses that way. For example, the full expression of the instinct of self-preservation is cowardice, and of the desire to acquire, avarice. And sentries must resist the impulse to sleep while they are standing guard on the city wall. So why do we so highly privilege the sexual impulse? Lewis responded:

> Now though I see no good reason for giving sex this privilege, I think I see a strong cause. It is this. It is part of the nature of a strong erotic passion . . . that it makes more towering promises than any other emotion. . . . To be in love involves the almost irresistible conviction that one will go on being in love until one dies and that possession of the beloved will confer, not merely frequent ecstasies, but settled, fruitful, deep-rooted, lifelong happiness. Hence all seems to be at stake. If we miss this chance we shall have lived in vain. At the very thought of such a doom we sink into fathomless depths of self-pity.

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> Unfortunately these promises are found often to be quite untrue. Every experienced adult knows this to be so as regards all erotic passions (except the one he himself is feeling at the moment). . . . When two people achieve lasting happiness, this is not solely because they are great lovers but because they are also—I must put it crudely—good people: controlled, loyal, fair-minded, mutually adaptable people. If we establish a "right to (sexual) happiness" that supersedes all the ordinary rules of behavior, we do so not because of what our passion shows itself to be in experience but because of what it professes to be while we are in the grip of it. Hence, while the bad behavior is real and works miseries and degradations, the happiness which was the object of the behavior turns out again and again to be illusory. Everyone (except Mr. A. and Mrs. B. [two married people who are divorcing in order to marry each other]) knows that Mr. A. in a year or so may have the same reason for deserting his new wife as for deserting his old. He will see himself again as the great lover, and his pity for himself will exclude all pity for the woman.[8]

Divorce and the "Matthean exception." What does Scripture say about divorce? Christ taught clearly that God's original intent was permanence in marriage (Mk 10:1-12; Lk 16:18). The model is God himself, as illustrated in the book of Hosea; God, though grievously sinned against more than any human spouse, forgave and remained faithful to his covenant. Even in the Old Testament, divorce was explicitly forbidden in some cases (Deut 22:13-21, 28-30). At the same time, Moses, Jesus and Paul recognized that the ideal was not always met and thus set up restrictions and safeguards to correct the failure or to limit the damage where uncorrectable.

In the key Old Testament passage (Deut 24:1-4), Moses did not endorse divorce, but neither did he forbid it. He simply set up some guidelines to protect the wife when a husband divorced her for some "indecency"; this probably refers to "any lewd, immoral behavior, sometimes including though not restricted to adultery—e.g., lesbianism or sexual misconduct that fell short of intercourse," though still shocking.[9] Christ taught that this legislation was a concession to Israel's "hardness of heart" (Mt 19:3-9). The husband could not simply send his wife away and then afterward take her back on a whim. He had to make it official in writing so that she would be

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able to marry someone else rather than be treated as a pariah in society. Further, in some unexplained way, should she ever become free again, the first husband could not remarry her because she was "defiled." Since the rationale is not given, and since God's explicit instructions to Hosea seem to be the opposite—taking back the harlot again and again—most Protestants do not seek to apply this aspect of the law today in the church age.

But did Christ or Paul make any concessions to human failure? This is the crux of the debate. In both Matthew passages on the subject (Mt 5:31-32; 19:3-9), Christ forbids divorce "except on the ground of unchastity" (RSV). For those who believe there is never any ground for divorce recognized by God—based on Mark 10:11-12, where no exception is given—several approaches have been taken.

Some have disallowed the exception phrase, claiming it is Matthew's comments on what Jesus intended or a later writer's addition to soften Jesus' hard teaching. But we have no textual reason to doubt this is the authentic, authoritative word of Christ. Others restrict the definition of the term *unchastity* or *fornication* to the rare case of a Jewish man, like Joseph, who in the betrothal period comes to believe that his espoused is not a virgin; thus the Jewish betrothal would be dissolved (cf. Mt 1:19). Still others argue that "fornication" refers only to the specific sin of certain marriages forbidden in Leviticus 18. After all, the Jerusalem council (Acts 15) offers guidance to Gentile Christians in light of four key Jewish sensitivities rooted in Leviticus 17–18: eating strangled animals, eating meat with blood still in it, eating food sacrificed to idols, and fornication. So Matthew, writing for a Jewish audience, would have felt the force of Leviticus 18's list of illicit sexual relations so that he permitted divorce in light of their violation. This particular argument assumes the early church placed these ceremonial restrictions on Gentiles with Leviticus 18 as their reference point—an interpretation few accept.

The above arguments are inadequate. "Fornication" or "sexual immorality" (*porneia*) is a broad term for all varieties of sexual sin. The word "adultery" (*moicheia*) is sometimes distinguished from "fornication" (cf. Mt 5:32; 19:9; 1 Cor 6:9: "fornicators . . . adulterers"); sometimes the meaning of these words overlaps. Jesus' hearers would have understood this to be

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any sexual infidelity in marriage—including incest, adultery, homosexual relations and the like—not simply "adultery." The context of the Matthew passages does not restrict grounds for divorce to adultery alone.

A third approach focuses on grammar: divorce is permitted on such grounds, but not remarriage following divorce. Most scholars do not hold this view since the presumption in Jesus' day—in both the Jewish and Greco-Roman worlds—was that if divorce was justified, then so was remarriage. Divorce was a *dissolution,* not simply a *separation;* thus, all things being equal, the certificate of divorce (Deut 24:1-4) indicated a woman was free to marry. In fact, while Jesus permits, but does not demand, divorce for sexual infidelity, Jewish law did demand divorce for it. This is why one can easily see why Mark 10:11-12 would not include reference to sexual infidelity.[10] Thus, even though some evangelicals appeal to the witness of early Christian writers who rejected the possibility of remarriage after divorce, we must give priority to Jesus' own words in their first-century Jewish context.

Another problem with the "divorce-but-not-remarry" view is that the exception isn't really much of an exception. A divorcing man may be doing wrong, but no matter what the reason for divorce, he is not committing adultery if he doesn't have sexual union with anyone else. What sense does it make that Christ would allow for an exception to the rule only insofar as divorce is concerned and not remarriage? In what way is the divorced-but-single person committing adultery? Only remarriage makes adultery an issue, and, as we have noted, legitimate divorce and permission to remarry were presumed by Jewish and Greco-Roman societies.

Divorce and the "Pauline privilege." While God hates divorce (Mal 2:16) and while Scripture generally prohibits it, because of human fallenness, Jesus makes one exception: When one party in the marriage cheats sexually, the innocent party does not commit the sin of adultery if, following divorce, he or she remarries. This has been called the "Matthean exception."

However, another exception is permitted—namely, for desertion or abandonment. The apostle to the Gentiles, Paul, addresses a pastoral concern of Gentile (pagan) unbelievers abandoning their spouses because

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they had become followers of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul cites Christ's teaching, reaffirming the general principle: no divorce (1 Cor 7:10). If the spouse does leave (reason unspecified by Paul), she has only two options: remain unmarried or be reconciled to her mate. (Of course, if the mate remarries or commits adultery in some other way, Christ's teaching comes into play.) Then Paul deals with the problem of an unconverted mate who wants to permanently leave. Don't coerce, says the apostle, but let him go free. We can assume this applies to any mate who is behaving like an unconverted person, whether or not he is a church member. The majority opinion in Protestant circles has been that this is a second exception, a ground for legitimate divorce and remarriage: permanent desertion. This has been called the "Pauline privilege."

We should not view these two as ad hoc exceptions that emerge due to disparate immoral circumstances. Rather, sexual infidelity and desertion have in common that they break one or another component of the marriage covenant rooted in Genesis 2:24: (a) personal allegiance or loyalty ("leaving and cleaving") and (b) interpersonal intimacy culminating in sexual relations (the two becoming "one flesh"). "Unfaithfulness destroys sexual exclusivity; desertion reneges on the commitment to 'leave and cleave.'"[11]

Though recognition of the exception for adultery is all but universal, there are many who do not see desertion as a second exception. The term "is not bound" (1 Cor 7:15 NIV) is considered by many scholars to be a technical term often used for divorce; therefore, the one who has been permanently deserted is considered eligible for remarriage. Others hold that the freedom is simply to remain single, not feeling guilty for failing to hold on to the departing mate. However, most hold that such "freedom" is hardly true freedom; one did not need apostolic approval to be deserted. But the interpretation may not be as clear-cut as Christ's exception.

If one divorces without legitimate biblical grounds (sexual infidelity or permanent desertion), how does that person "commit adultery" (Mt 5:32; 19:9)? Is this sin forgivable? Some have held that if by getting remarried a person commits adultery, it must mean that an adulterous relationship is entered and continues as long as the marriage continues. Very few have

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held this view. Indeed, Jesus' statement about adultery after remarriage appears to be *hyperbolic*. If it were literal adultery, it would either exclude exceptions for divorce (on the grounds of, say, adultery or desertion), or it would grant equal exemption to the guilty party, since the guilty party can't remain literally married to the innocent party if the reverse is not true. In other words, second or third marriages are not adulterous unions in the sense that we need to break up those marriages and require those involved in them to return to their original spouses, if the latter remain available. The point of the hyperbole is to draw our attention to the point of being absolutely committed to marriage and that divorce, even if justified, is always a departure from the way God desires every marriage to be.[12]

We saw with polygamy that it would be wrong to require a tribal chieftain to divorce all wives but his first. Rather, he should remain faithful to this commitment to his wives—although teaching the next generation about God's ideal of monogamy. In a parallel way, to remarry following divorce on nonbiblical grounds is sinful, but to divorce again would simply be another sin that could not correct the first. The remarried person should remain married to his second mate. Another analogy is the person who marries an unbeliever. The believer sins in doing so, but once the marriage is consummated and the two become one flesh, the marriage is the will of God, and breaking it becomes sinful. And, of course, if the deserting partner remarries, then that would be yet *another* reason for the "innocent" party to remarry.

Some New Testament scholars raise the question: Are sexual infidelity and abandonment the unexceptional grounds for divorce, beyond which no one should go? Or are they complementary examples of a marital breach so great that the marriage simply cannot be salvaged without greater damage done? Could wife-beating, say, be an example of violating the personal allegiance/loyalty dimension of the marriage covenant? One must take care here. First, whatever the marital breach, the hope and ideal is for reconciliation where there is genuine repentance. Second, even where *forgiveness* may be bestowed for deep marital violations, the further step of *reconciliation* may not be achievable because trust has been so shattered. Third, some biblical scholars would leave open this door for divorce on

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other, still quite serious, grounds; however, they would acknowledge that the only two clear-cut conditions are sexual infidelity and abandonment. In the end, we should be careful about going beyond what the Scriptures clearly say on these matters, though we recognize that pastoral decisions on this topic can be challenging and emotionally wrenching.

In summary, then, God's will is monogamy, and divorce is wrong. If, because of either partner's "hardness of heart" (sin), divorce takes place, the believer should remain single. If adultery or permanent desertion are involved prior to or subsequent to divorce, the one who did not commit these sins does not necessarily sin by marrying another person. If a person does commit the sin of adultery (as, for example, in a nonbiblical remarriage) or any other sin (as, for example, selfish behavior that led a mate to divorce) and truly repents, God will forgive that person, as should God's people.

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16

Nonmarital Violations of God's Purposes for Sexuality

Sexual Covetousness

Lust: Mental sexual coveting. We have briefly touched on the topic of lust, but a brief review is fitting here. The word *lust* (noun: *epithymia;* verb: *epithymeō*) can be translated "desire" or "covet(ing)." It can refer generally to any fallen desires associated with a world alienated from God (1 Jn 2:16)—greed, envy, and the like. Sexual lust, of course, includes imagining having sexual relations outside a marriage relationship. But it can include any kind of sexual pleasure or satisfaction outside of God's will. Dwelling on any sexual thought that would be immoral to act out is sinful lust.

As we said, sexually immoral acts begin *in the mind,* the primary sex organ. Adultery begins with dwelling on lustful thoughts, then fantasizing, then lowering one's sexual guard with others by engaging in emotional affairs and going beyond. While some will claim that sexual fantasizing is harmless and private—"just as long as you don't hurt anyone," we're often told—a corrupted imagination is, in fact, a form of self-harm (see the discussion of pornography below).

If procreation were the only purpose in human sexuality, if humans were no more than animals, perhaps fantasizing would be harmless. But God has other purposes in mind for it—relational and sexual unity, for instance. So a sexually corrupted mind will profoundly affect marital unity and undermine its intimate, permanent bond—a bond reflecting the unity of Father, Son and Spirit and expressed in Christ's love for and union with the church (Eph 5). Thus, intimacy must be exclusive. Christ calls everyone

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to mental purity, and spouses must be faithful in mind, not simply in body. Mental infidelity erodes marriage; ultimately, sexual sin is an assault on the image of God and an affront to God himself (Gen 39:9; Ps 51:4).

The author of Genesis recounts that Rachel was "beautiful of form and face" (Gen 29:17). So lust is not the same as recognizing a person's pleasant appearance. However, a husband and wife should take care to honor each other and not draw attention to an outsider's looks. Further, guarding our eyes and thoughts means making Christ-honoring choices about what movies to watch and books to read—and protecting our children's minds as well.

And how we speak about members of the opposite sex is becoming cheapened and dishonorable (cf. Eph 5:3-4). In our increasingly promiscuous culture, beauty is routinely downgraded, degraded and demeaned to the language of being "hot," even among Christians. Referring to fellow humans as "hot" or "babes" is to objectify them and to reduce them to sexual objects rather than regarding them as a daughter or son of a father and mother—or as divine image bearers or as persons for whom Christ died. While such language would be appropriate within the intimate confines of marriage, it is not fitting to make such sexually loaded comments outside that setting.

Like appetite for food or drink, one's sexual appetite can be gratified for a time. And as with habitual snacking, momentary sexual fantasy does not truly satisfy. It was not designed to do so, but only stimulates the desire for more. This is what some have called "the law of diminishing returns." Once one achieves a certain level of sexual gratification, one is not satisfied with remaining there, but desires "something more" and then takes it to the next level—and so it goes on.

Responding to sexual temptation. One ought to take care to cultivate mental purity—not simply physical purity. Indeed, godliness does not come without the cultivation of godly habits. We are to discipline ourselves for the purpose of godliness (1 Tim 4:8), to "prepare [our] minds for action" and "be self-controlled" as we set our hope on Christ (1 Pet 1:13). We have noted how pornography is like a crack addiction, and how this destroys not only personal integrity but ruins marital intimacy and creates

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barriers of mistrust and suspicion. Despite Hollywood inspired illusions and fantasies of personal fulfillment through adulterous relationships, the reality is one of shattered lives, massive guilt, family upheaval and divorce.

Lust lies at the heart of adultery. When addressing the matter of lust, Jesus exhorts his disciples to take concrete steps to battle this—to take severe, ruthless action to avoid lustful activity—to "pluck it out" and "cut it off" (Mt 5:29-30 RSV). This means honest accountability to others, installing pornography filters on computers (including vigilantly protecting children from exposure to it), and also directing one's mind to what is honorable, just, pure and praiseworthy. Not only should earnest Christians cry to God for deliverance when tempted (1 Cor 10:13); they should make no provision to feed sexual temptation (Rom 13:14). They should avoid the thing, the person, the place, the activity that sets the stage for sexual temptation. In fact, as necessary, flee—run from the tempting situation (Gen 39:12; Prov 5:8; 2 Tim 2:22). This includes setting standards and preserving proper boundaries—for example, a married person not driving alone with someone of the opposite sex or counseling such a person in a secluded area. Not to take this challenge to discipleship seriously, Jesus says, results in condemnation (Mt 18:8-9; cf. Mt 5:29-30). As Billy Graham once said, "Win the battle against sex and you win the battle of your life. Lose it, then you lose the battle of your life."

Now, many Christians engage in self-flagellation and wallow in guilt because impure thoughts come flitting through their mind. But Scripture emphasizes the wrongness of choosing to *dwell* on those thoughts, of choosing to lust after another, rather than vigilantly redirecting those thoughts. The disciple of Christ would avoid much unnecessary guilt if he asked: "How should I respond to these flitting thoughts? Will I dwell on them, or vigilantly redirect my mind?" Martin Luther is reputed to have said that you can't keep birds from flying around your head, but you can keep them from making a nest in your hair! Temptation itself is not sin.

To look at a woman lustfully is to commit adultery with her in one's heart, Jesus said (Mt 5:27-28). Again, we emphasize that it is a mistake to assume that lust is "just as bad as adultery." This both ignores Scripture and trivializes sin. Jesus is not saying that all sins are *equally sinful;* rather, he is

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saying that lust and adultery—and anger and murder—are still *sin.*

Romans 13:14 exhorts us to make no provision for the flesh. Temptation to lust can come through sight or through touch (Mt 5:28-30). While we have addressed temptation through sight, we should address sexual temptation through touch. Care must be exercised in evaluating the potential for temptation in oneself and in others through casual physical contact with sexually attractive people. Certain forms of social dancing such as square dancing or other forms of group dancing can be fun and nonarousing. Other forms can be more intimate and sexually arousing (especially for men); some of them—like "grinding"—are coarse and crass and should be avoided. To engage in sexually stimulating dancing with someone other than one's mate is to "make provision for the flesh," for oneself and possibly for one's dance partner.

Thus we are instructed to deal severely with temptation. This means not only to avoid temptation, but also to avoid being a temptation to others—including modesty in dress.

Modesty

The teaching of Christ on sexual desire, which we have just considered, is the strongest teaching on modesty. Lust is sin; an equal wrong is to cause another to sin (Mt 18:6-7; also Rom 14:13, 15, 21; 1 Cor 8:9-13). The Christian, therefore, will never deliberately dress to entice others to sexual desire. And even if someone does not dress with the intention of arousing or enticing, the effect can be the same if one is inattentive to these matters.

The Bible does not say a great deal about nudity, but there are some clear indications of God's purposes for us (Gen 2:25; 3:7-11; 9:22-23; Ex 20:26; 28:42-43). The human body is not shameful, but beautiful; when God created man and woman he said, "It is good." And, we are told, they were naked and not ashamed. But the human body is exclusive, sacred and private—it belongs to the one other person God has given in marriage (1 Cor 7:3-5). To unclothe certain parts of the human body is sexually stimulating to members of the opposite sex. Therefore, when one dresses to induce lust in another person, it is sinful.

But that which is tempting differs from society to society and from era

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to era. In India, for example, the calves of a woman's legs are covered, but not necessarily the midriff. In old Japan it was the nape of the neck that enticed, and the daring geisha would arrange the collar of her kimono to expose a bit more of her neck. In certain African tribes the loose woman wears a bra, and the modest girl goes topless, whereas in a South American tribe it is the opposite: modest women wear sleeves and tops but no bottoms. The most shameful thing would be to expose the armpits. Modesty, then, has something to do with culture—how dress is viewed by a particular people. Biblical modesty is not to be controlled by the surrounding culture, of course, but it is certainly influenced by it.

To further complicate matters, styles keep changing, at least in the twenty-first-century Western world. And the changes are not always neutral. A fallen society uses dress, not to enhance personhood or inner beauty of spirit, but to exploit human weakness for financial profit. James Laver, the leading authority on the history of dress, attests to this:

> But, after a short time . . . excessive concentration on an area brings its own penalty. The portion of the body in question becomes too familiar; it becomes a bore; or, as the psychologists say, it "exhausts its erotic capital." Now the emphasis changes, the zone shifts. The new zone always seems a little indecent at first. But that emotional impact is the real reason for the change.
>
> Did they not promote the lust of the eye? Of course they did. That was their object. So fashion and prudery began the fencing match that has lasted to this day.[1]

The world is constantly seeking to press the Christian into its own sinful mold, and the modest Christian, aware of this, will not adopt any new style that is ostentatious, drawing attention to self, or that increases sex appeal, until the style is no longer ostentatious or stimulating. Rather than join in the vanguard of change, the modest woman (or man) will wait until the new style has a history long enough so that spiritually mature Christian men (or women) testify the style no longer need be a temptation to lustful desire.

What of nudity or seminudity in the media and in art? Much of contemporary print and cinema, photography and TV is designed to be sexually stimulating. A Christian who participates in producing such art is violating God's standard of modesty, causing others to stumble. The unclothed

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figure in fine art is probably not sexually stimulating to many, though there are exceptions—some "fine art" is designedly erotic, and some people are more easily tempted. But whatever one's judgment on that issue, one point is beyond dispute: Modeling for such art is not the role of a Christian. The historic record of the moral failure of artists and their models attests to the incompatibility of nude modeling and purity.

When Paul and Peter speak about women dressing modestly (e.g., 1 Tim 2:9; 1 Pet 3:3-4), they are referring to the avoidance of showing off social status with gold, pearls and costly garments. Of course, the Scriptures condemn seduction and promote wholesome sexual expression in the context of marriage (Prov 5:15-19; 7:1-27; Is 3:16; etc.). Paul refers to the body's "unpresentable parts" that call for "greater modesty" (1 Cor 12:23 RSV), but this is often disregarded within the Christian community. We have been in church settings where some women (and no doubt this is true of men as well) wear clothes more suited to a night club setting—and sometimes this immodesty extends to members of a "praise band" or "worship team" or to a person doing the "special music." This only feeds the objectification of others rather than focusing on inner character and honoring God. Modesty in dress, beginning in Eden, is God's wrapping for the wonderful gift of marriage. It is his fence around the pure mind of the sincere Christian, protecting it for the uninhibited fulfillment of erotic love in the exclusive intimacy and permanent commitment of marriage.

Pornography

It has been rightly said that the problem with pornography is not that it reveals too *much,* but that it reveals too *little.* All it reveals are objectified body parts for sexual arousal rather than God's image bearer—a person's heart, mind, soul and spirit.

What is pornography? Pornography is the portrayal of sexually oriented material, in written, audio or visual form, deliberately designed to stimulate sexually. Outside of marriage this means incitement to lust and therefore deliberate seduction, deliberate temptation. Sexuality is ripped out of its rightful context of marital love. As we noted about nudity, what may create sexual arousal in some societies or in certain eras may not in

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others, but pornography aims at an audience, most of whom would likely find this communicative content arousing.[2]

Does pornography actually bring harm to individuals, society and those involved in producing it? Some claim it frees them from sexual inhibitions. Those in the pornography industry will claim there is "no causal connection" between pornography and demonstrable harm to individuals or society. The controversial Presidential Commission on Pornography appointed in 1967 concluded pornography did not negatively affect youth or adults, thus recommending that all legal restrictions on pornography be lifted. But the claim that books and pictures have no influence on reader or viewer is patently false, as any advertising agent can testify. Indeed, the Attorney General's 1986 Commission on Pornography reversed virtually every conclusion of the 1967 commission.[3]

But what does Scripture say to this? Lusting in one's heart is mental adultery (Mt 5:28). We are to lay aside the deeds of darkness, put on the things of Christ, make no provision for the flesh (Rom 13:12-14). Immorality, impurity, coarse jesting and filthiness are not fitting and should not be associated with the saints, but rather the giving of thanks (Eph 5:2-3). It is disgraceful even to speak of certain things done in secret (Eph 5:12). Our minds should dwell on what is noble, just, pure, lovely, excellent, of good repute and praiseworthy (Phil 4:8). Paul exhorted Timothy to flee youthful lusts and pursue righteousness (2 Tim 2:22). Mental fidelity is a vital habit to cultivate in a sex-saturated society. It is not mere avoidance activity, but a positive channeling of our minds in the direction of giving thanks, of putting on Christ, of pursuing righteousness (Eph 5:3-4).

Clearly, the average person will certainly be influenced to sexual lust by reading or viewing pornography. After all, that is the intent. Tragically, 90 percent of American children ages 8–16 are exposed to pornography. In 1998, there were 14 million pornography sites online; by July 2003, it was 260 million; by the end of 2004, it jumped to 420 million. Today there are more than 1 billion. Pornography dominates the movies watched in hotel rooms, and even cell phone pornography is a booming industry.[4] Countries such as Iceland, India and the UK have taken steps to ban pornography entirely. British Prime Minister David Cameron said that por-

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nography is "corroding childhood." So if people want pornography, they should have to pay for it with a credit card.

What are pornography's effects on individuals and societies? From a biblical perspective, no sin is strictly private, and even if pornography were private, it still does damage to the viewer, and it will stunt one's spiritual and social growth. Dr. Judith Reisman, who has dedicated herself to studying the social impact of pornography, notes how viewing pornography acts as an addictive drug; exposure to it triggers endorphins and testosterone, creating addictions comparable to crack cocaine or heroin. Viewing pornography produces sexual frustration, arousing the emotional and physical conditions for intercourse but without the ability to properly fulfill them.[5]

As we observed earlier, pornography objectifies humans made in God's image; it degrades them. Exposure to pornography diminishes the capacity for wholesome relationships with the opposite sex. The relationship of husband and wife or with a future mate is damaged by every thought that undermines the unity of the two. In fact, thought often does lead to action, and no immoral act ever came from any place but the thought in someone's mind. As we noted, the physical act of adultery begins to take shape in the so-called private sphere of the mind. Not only is the marriage partner affected because of a diminished marital bond with the invasion into their exclusive intimacy. It also affects the children, who must live under the leadership of an impure, cheating parent. In fact, in the case of Christians, everyone they touch will be affected by their loss of integrity as a true reflection of Christ and by the consequent loss of personal spiritual power.

There is another victim of pornography who is not often considered: the subject of the photography or live production and the writer of pornography. There has been a steady outcry against the use of *children* in pornography, and in Denmark the humane society decries the increasing use of *animals* in portraying bestiality, but adults are considered free agents and not victims at all. True, feminists decry the woman's role in pornography, but not so much the brutalizing effect on the performer as the demeaning of the woman's role. This subjugation of women is indeed the normal fare of pornography. Little is said of the degrading effect on the performer. And

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yet the model, the performer, the writer and all who participate in the production and distribution of pornography are sinning and causing others to sin.

Beyond these personal relationships, however, many are concerned with the impact of pornography on society at large. The Heritage Foundation's Jill Manning presented to the US Senate the following documented influences of pornography: increased marital distress; increased risk of separation and divorce; diminished intimacy and sexual satisfaction in marriage; adultery; increased appetite for more graphic types of pornography and sexual activity associated with abusive, illegal or unsafe practices; devaluation of monogamy, marriage and child rearing; increased numbers of people struggling with compulsive and addictive sexual behavior; less time and attention given to children (who themselves may be at risk of encountering pornographic materials); parental separation and divorce; and more likely parental job loss and financial strain. Children or adolescents exposed to pornography will experience long-term negative, addictive emotional responses that will, for starters, encourage earlier sexual experimentation and a mindset that optimal sex can be experienced without affection for one's partner and detached from any thought of family life. Pornography affects wholesome relationships with the opposite sex. Pornography devastates, wrecking individual lives, marriages, families, and, ultimately, society.[6]

What can be done on a wider level? The Heritage Foundation makes these suggestions for a responsible approach to the dangers of pornography:

- Educating the public about the risks of pornography consumption
- Supporting research that examines aspects of Internet pornography currently unknown
- Allocating resources to enforce laws already in place, and lastly,
- Legally implementing technological solutions that separate Internet content, allowing consumers to choose the type of legal content they wish to have access to.[7]

Pornography, along with various forms of "virtual sex" through the Internet and even cell phones, is sleazy and cheap, trying to fulfill *real* God-

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given sexual desires in a *virtual* world without the warmth of human love and commitment. Pornography destroys spiritually all who involve themselves in producing or using it, and its corrupting influence spills over into the entire life of the society that tolerates it. The good news is that in the gospel, Christ offers grace, forgiveness and deliverance from guilt and shame and bondage; he provides us with spiritual resources—his Spirit, prayer and Scripture, the Christian community and the spiritual disciplines to help loosen sin's hold on us.

Sex education in schools. Sex education for children in the public school is definitely not designed to stimulate sexually, at least not by most responsible sex educators. Some "sex ed" curricula are designed to help students "create" their own set of fulfilling sexual values—along with avoiding unwanted pregnancy, venereal disease, AIDS and sexual violence. Others are more explicit in their attempt to reshape society's values and to rid it of Judeo-Christian ethics, including promoting homosexuality and gay marriage as equally desirable options to traditional marriage. An important question is, "Who will be 'educating' my children about sexual matters?" The sad truth is that no more than 10 percent of Christian parents even attempt to provide this kind of guidance for their children. If Christian parents and the church do not give guidance to the children entrusted to them, is it any wonder professing Christians lack sexual clarity and conviction? The church and Christian youth leaders should work together with involved parents to communicate the biblical message about marriage and sexuality to the next generation. Instruction about sex should first take place in the context of the home, where a loving marriage is modeled and where discussion and inquiry naturally unfold.

The Christian cannot escape the values debate. There can be no value-free or judgment-free sex education. Human sexuality, unlike mathematics, physics or English grammar, cannot be separated from a biblical view of human sexuality. Sex without love is far from sex within the context of permanent commitment in a monogamous marriage. To teach sex without teaching about monogamous, committed marriage is inherently socially subversive and ultimately counterproductive.

Sex education within public schools—no matter how scientifically in-

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formed—will typically portray sex without commitment, detached from the context of marriage, and open to "alternative" expressions of sexuality. Of course, the ideal is to have the technical knowledge and the commitment, along with the biblical knowledge of what sex is all about. Parents should be vigilant for their children's sexual purity, and they should be informed about what public schools are teaching. It is safest to simply withdraw one's child from this time of sex education "instruction" in place of an alternate topic and learning activity. Many public schools allow for this, although others are more strident about indoctrination, especially in urban areas; in this case, Christian parents may need to address these issues at an administrative level in order to press for more just educational alternatives in a pluralistic setting.

Masturbation. It is said that 90 percent of all males over age fifteen have experienced some form of self-induced orgasm at least once. Many masturbate regularly. Among females the estimates range from 40 to 60 percent who have had at least one erotic experience through self-stimulation. There is no demonstrated biological drive for release on the part of the female, but the male experiences a buildup of sperm until some form of ejaculation becomes biologically necessary in most males. This release can come consciously through sexual relations with another person, it can be self-induced, or it can come unconsciously in an emission during sleep, often accompanied by a dream. Incidentally, the Mosaic law matter-of-factly mentions nocturnal emissions (Deut 23:10); in fact, both seminal emissions and menstruation—though natural and recurring—still required ceremonial cleansing. *Both these discharges represented what was "outside" the wholeness of the human body—just as unclean foods entering the body would symbolically pollute or defile.* For the Israelites, vaginal blood and semen were powerful symbols of life, but *their loss symbolized death.* To lose one of these life-fluids represented moving in the direction of death.[8]

As for masturbation, Scripture does not mention this specifically. Now, a sexually permissive and sex-promoting society may increase the incidence of masturbation, but it is common in all societies. What, then, do Christians say to the questions that arise so insistently?

Historically, most churches have spoken against masturbation. Many

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myths have spread concerning adverse physical results of masturbation, but these have all been discredited on scientific investigation in recent decades. Nevertheless, either because it is wrong and the conscience, knowing this, brings condemnation, or because churches or society have spoken against it as wrong, the most common response still seems to be a sense of guilt or shame about the practice. But in recent years a number of Christian marriage counselors have followed the lead of secular psychologists in condoning or advocating masturbation.

There seem to be four viewpoints among Christians who speak to this issue:

- Masturbation is a gift of God.
- It is probably all right if it is not indulged in with lustful fantasies, is not compulsive, is not performed in a group, and does not produce guilt.
- It is probably wrong because it is against nature and may be in violation of the biblical law of purity.
- It is certainly wrong.

Until the last half of the twentieth century, the church held that masturbation is certainly wrong, and though there are no statistics to validate this judgment, it is likely that most evangelicals adhere to this position or to the position that it is probably wrong. Since both positions lean on the same arguments, let us combine the two positions.

The Bible does not speak directly to this issue—just as it does not speak directly to questions we hold to be moral—pornography, drug abuse, abortion. The Bible may not speak to this particular issue—not surprisingly—because young people were married much earlier and reached sexual maturity later than today. Thus, in ancient Jewish society temptation to masturbation was greatly reduced. It is our early sexual maturity, coupled with a later age of marriage, that creates the pressure to find alternate sexual outlets. In any event, the argument from silence is notoriously inconclusive. Rather, we should ask, does Scripture hold us to any principles that would preclude autoeroticism?

Christ indicated the beginning of sexual sin (mental sexual desire) and Moses gave the ending (sexual intercourse with a person other than one's

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marriage partner), so that any form of sexual activity in between would seem to be included. Since most masturbation is connected with sexual fantasy or imagination, that form of it, at least, is wrong. Even when this is not so, 1 Corinthians 7:4 gives the clear principle that one's body does not belong to oneself but to one's partner so far as sexual activity is concerned. Or, more broadly, our bodies are not meant for sexual immorality but are temples of the Spirit; we have been bought with a price; therefore we should glorify God in our bodies (1 Cor 6:13, 19-20).

Furthermore, self-stimulation, at least apart from sexual play in marriage, violates two and probably all three of God's purposes in marriage. The first purpose of marriage is oneness; sex was designed to cement and promote that oneness. Masturbation runs in the opposite direction. It is (pseudo-)sex stripped of love, commitment and all the purposes for which sex was created. Rather than uniting with another for mutual fulfillment, it is typically pure self-centeredness. The second purpose of marriage is procreation, and, needless to say, masturbation does not promote that. In fact, it is advocated by some as an excellent form of population control. The third purpose of marriage, reflecting the image of God, would also seem to be violated since the self-induced sex act is by definition isolated from one's rightful partner and self-oriented.

While we recognize that we cannot make an absolute case for forbidding the practice, it seems clear to us that one cannot make a solid case for condoning it. One thing is clear: "Whatever is not from faith is sin" (Rom 14:23), and if one does not have a solid conviction of God's approval, one does not have freedom to engage in it.

We have already discussed dealing with sexual desire in part four ("Virtues and Vices"). As for male sexual release, the involuntary nocturnal emission is a natural release valve. As such, there are no grounds whatsoever for guilty feelings. One must keep in mind that when erotic dreams accompany the emission, they *may* be related to overexposure to sexual stimulation during conscious hours.

What of female release? Let it be emphasized that in the case of the female there is no proven biological pressure, so that if there is any pressure other than the desire for pleasuring oneself, it is psychological. But the

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reason urged for the inevitability (and thus the rightness) of ejaculation in the male can reasonably apply only to the male.

Then there is another way of release for both male and female: sublimation—that is, diverting or channeling one's sexual energies in other constructive, life-giving directions. Of course, this includes *right thinking* about who we are—namely, embodied, sexual beings—as opposed to the "gnostic" view that we are simply souls that can exist independently of bodily desires and impulses. This sublimation also takes seriously the place of God's grace and forgiveness, the place of deep worship and the safety of Christian community. The intentional redirecting of our energies can include physical exercise, creative hobbies, mental stimulation, reading literature and engaging in volunteer groups and activities.

Sex Before Marriage

Though the violation of God's wonderful purposes for sex begins in the mind, it does not ordinarily end there—sex was never intended to be merely imaginary, but to be enacted. The greatest emphasis in biblical teaching on sexual impurity concerns behavior. Furthermore, it soon becomes clear that violation of God's purposes for marriage can take place prior to marriage. What, then, is God's standard of conduct in sexual relationships for the single person? Is sex before marriage biblically permissible?

The biblical evidence. It is not unusual to hear the objection that, yes, the Bible condemns adultery (married persons having sex outside the marriage bond), but it does not condemn premarital sex. This is a serious misreading of Scripture.

In biblical terms, a man *leaves* his father and mother, *cleaves* or binds himself to his wife, and *then* the two become sexually united as "one flesh" (Gen 2:24). Both in the Old and New Testaments, virginity is the proper expectation before marriage. The law of Moses expresses this: "I took this woman, but when I came near her, I did not find her a virgin" (Deut 22:14). The broader context of Deuteronomy 22:13-29 is that if there is premarital sex, it must lead to marriage. In the case of Exodus 22:16, we see the seduction of an unengaged girl; this scenario involves the girl's consent—not forcible rape (as in Deut 22:28); this would be called "statutory rape," in

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today's terms. The assumption given this "statutory rape" situation is that premarital sex is out of place and that marriage should be pursued, assuming this is agreed to by the girl and her father.[9]

In the New Testament, the same assumption is made. In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul says that it is better to marry—not "live together" or "cohabit"—than to burn with sexual passion. Paul urges marriage for sexual "burning" (1 Cor 7:8-9, 36-38); he does not endorse some "right" to sexual release through intercourse. Later, Paul writes to the Corinthians: "For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, *so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin*" (2 Cor 11:2). Again, sexual fidelity before marriage is presumed. The general New Testament terms "sexual immorality" and "sexually immoral" (*porneia, pornē*) assume that sexual activity outside of marriage is illicit sex (Acts 15:20; 1 Cor 6:9, 13, 18; Gal 5:19; Eph 5:3; Col 3:5; 1 Thess 4:3).

The scientific evidence. Sexual relationships *before* marriage damage the fulfillment of God's purposes *in* marriage. In our utilitarian culture, living together first is a way to "test the waters"—to "try before you buy." Not surprisingly, there is a correlation between cohabitation and lower marital satisfaction, far greater likelihood of divorce, weaker commitment to a permanent relationship, weaker marital adjustment, and no greater knowledge of one's partner. Indeed, sexually active teenagers are at psychological risk, as they are more prone to alcohol abuse, illegal drugs and problems in school, while sexually active girls specifically tend to be depressed and are more likely to attempt suicide than those who are not.[10]

Sociologist Dr. Nancy Moore Clatworthy conducted research at Ohio State University and its surrounding community. She was stunned by the differences of those who lived together before marriage and those who went straight to the altar.[11] She was asked, "But doesn't living together before marriage help to iron out some of the disagreements that every marriage inevitably must face?" Clatworthy responded that when it came to finances, household matters, recreation, demonstration of affection, and friends, those who had cohabited disagreed *more often* than those who hadn't. And what about trying to determine "sexual compatibility"? Clat-

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worthy replied that this is what surprised her most: "Couples who had lived together before marriage disagreed about it more often."

Furthermore, those who had lived together and then married also faced greater challenges in the areas of adjustment, happiness and respect. And those who hadn't lived together, for example, "showed a much higher degree of respect than those who had." As for personal happiness, the *only* people who checked the "extremely unhappy" answer were the ones who lived together before marriage. *None* of the married-firsts checked that answer. Now this obviously doesn't mean that all married-firsts will be happy and those who live together will never be, but this certainly makes a strong statement against living together first.

What about security versus feeling suspicious? In response to the survey question, "How often do you fantasize breaking off your relationships with your spouse?" Clatworthy noted that *none* of those who had married first selected the choice "often." Only those who had previously cohabited marked "often." This isn't surprising since cohabitation lacks total commitment and trust (which marriage entails); so how could one partner rightfully protest the other's sexual involvements elsewhere? Clatworthy found that girls are especially vulnerable and less secure because the male (who typically moves in with a girl) can pick up and leave at any time.

Noted historian Arnold Toynbee observed that nineteen out of twenty-one notable civilizations perished not from conquest but from decay within.[12] Cambridge historian, J. D. Unwin studied eighty civilizations ranging over four thousand years and concluded: "Any human society is free to choose either to display great energy, or to enjoy sexual freedom; the evidence is that they cannot do both for more than one generation."[13]

As a twentieth-century example, consider the Soviet Union. Pitirim Sorokin, distinguished sociologist and professor at Harvard, in 1956 published the influential volume *The American Sex Revolution.* Before coming to America he was professor of sociology at the University of St. Petersburg in Russia. He wrote:

> During the first stage of the Revolution, its leaders deliberately attempted to destroy marriage and the family. Free love was glorified by the official "glass of water" theory. If a person is thirsty, so went the Party line, it is im-

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material what glass he uses when satisfying his thirst; it is equally unimportant how he satisfies his sex hunger.

The legal distinction between marriage and casual sexual intercourse was abolished. The Communist law spoke only of contracts between males and females for the satisfaction of their desires either for an indefinite or a definite period, a year, a month, a week, or even for a single night. One could marry and divorce as many times as desired. Husband or wife could obtain a divorce without the other being notified. It was not even necessary that marriage be registered. Bigamy and even polygamy were permissible under the new provisions. . . . Premarital relations were praised and extramarital relations were considered normal.

Within a few years, hordes of wild, homeless children became a menace to the Soviet Union. Millions of lives, especially of young girls, were wrecked; divorces skyrocketed, as did abortions. The hatreds and conflicts among polygamous and polyandrous mates rapidly mounted—and so did psychoneuroses.[14]

In Scripture, the apostle Paul points out that sex is a profoundly unitive act ("one flesh")—even with a prostitute (1 Cor 6:17). But sex without commitment is a moral charade; it is an outrageous distortion of reality to become naked with each other in body but not in soul. To experience physical intimacy without emotional and spiritual closeness undermines relational intimacy. And of course, children born into such a union do not have the glue of lifelong parental commitment, and they end up being damaged as a result, as separation of the cohabitants is more likely once children enter the picture. It is a cruel experiment to "test the waters" in cohabitation when the well-being of these little ones hangs in the balance—let alone the psychological and relational well-being of the couple.[15] Even if the couple does marry, they carry into their marriage the patterns set before marriage. The late Austrian pastor and counselor Walter Trobisch wrote,

When I as a pastor am called in to counsel in a marriage crisis, I can almost always trace the origin of the problems to the kind of life which the husband and wife lived before they were married. The young man who has not learned self-control before marriage will not have it during marriage. . . . In

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a sense, you deprive your future wife of something, even if you do not yet know her, and you endanger your happiness together.[16]

Trobisch wrote that premarital sex is like picking blossoms in the spring: the great joy of eating the ripened fruit in the late summer is no longer possible. Indeed, Scripture, statistics and history testify that the way of sexual self-control is the way of fulfillment for the unmarried. But in a society where the customary relationship between teenage boys and girls is a socially enforced, exclusive, private, personal relationship, how does one pursue the ultimate goal intended by God? We look at the topic of courtship and dating in the next chapter.

Miscellaneous Sexual Issues

There are some remaining sexual issues and questions to address—incest, pedophilia, bestiality, rape, transsexuality and hermaphroditism.

Incest. Since marriage is the proper context for sexual activity, sex between family members other than man and wife is prohibited by God. Marriages between blood relatives was directly forbidden in Israelite law (cf. Lev 18:1-17), and Paul calls for church discipline in the case of a professing believer in an incestuous relationship with a stepmother.[17] Incest involving father and children is particularly disturbing because it violates God's direct charge to fathers (Eph 6:4) and can distort a child's perception of the heavenly Father.

The extent of sexual abuse in the home is alarming. According to 2010 statistics, one in five girls is sexually abused; for boys, it is one in twenty. Of child sexual-abuse cases, most are intrafamilial. In another survey, three out of four adolescents were sexually abused by persons they knew well. This act involves coercion and control, and it harms children, leading to psychological damage and sexual promiscuity involving multiple partners.[18] Incest is a horrid sin, an indictment on the church if committed by Christians because today, as in New Testament times, it is a practice abhorrent even to unbelievers (1 Cor 5:1-8).

Pedophilia. Pedophilia is sexual attraction to prepubescent children. This desire and even sex acts between adults and minors—the "final taboo," as it's been called—is becoming increasingly mainstreamed. Seminars for

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continuing education credit are being offered by groups like B4U-ACT affirming that pedophiles can be psychologically healthy and well-adjusted.[19] The North American Man-Boy Love Association (NAMBLA), while condemning sexual abuse and coercion, supports "the rights of youth as well as adults to choose the partners with whom they wish to share and enjoy their bodies."[20] In a double issue of the *Journal of Homosexuality* (devoted to adult-child sex), one author approvingly refers to "social workers achieving miracles with apparently incorrigible young delinquents—not by preaching to them but by sleeping with them." This "did far more good than years in reformatories."[21] To make matters worse, the American Psychological Association (in its *Psychological Bulletin*) no longer views pedophilia as harmful.[22] There is even a (Dutch) journal, *Paedika: The Journal of Paedophilia*, whose premier issue began with the editorial acknowledgment: "The starting point of *Paedika* is necessarily our consciousness of ourselves as paedophiles."[23]

Pedophiles desire to give "love" to a child as they wish they had been loved at that child's age. Often, pedophiles have grown up in homes of neglect and abuse—emotionally, physically or sexually. Unable to soothe themselves, they desire to comfort and love another with the comfort they desired as prepubescent children, and this "love" becomes sexualized. Unfortunately, it is difficult to help pedophiles since they do not believe they are harming the child or that their desire is abnormal, though they may not act on this desire for fear of getting into trouble. To find help, pedophiles must first recognize that theirs is a disordered, distorted attempt at "love." Turning to God in repentance, letting go of past hurts from being sinned against, and finding support and counsel within the Christian community and even professional help will be part of the healing process.[24] Rather than seeing pedophilia as a fallen, distorted desire that, when acted on, can permanently damage a child's sexuality, many today are mainstreaming pedophilia as "normal," making sexual wholeness all the more elusive.

Bestiality. Likewise, bestiality is increasingly "normalized." Peter Singer, who opposes the Judeo-Christian tradition and the doctrine of the image of God in humans, argues that bestiality is morally permissible since humans are just "great apes." Recognizing this will lead to bestiality's no

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longer being "an offence to our status and dignity as human beings."[25] So, if three-dimensional sex is reduced to one, the physical, so that orgasm is the primary object of sex, why not "have fun" with an animal?

This subject is still taboo to some, but bestiality had been legalized in places like Sweden and Germany, though animal-rights groups have challenged and helped reverse this legislation on the grounds that animals cannot freely consent. According to Scripture, bestiality is just one degree on the downward spiral to ever lessening fulfillment and increasing destruction. Scripture is categorical in its condemnation of bestiality (Ex 22:19; Lev 18:23; 20:15-16; Deut 27:21)—unlike Israel's ancient Near Eastern neighbors, which permitted it. In the Canaanite pantheon of gods and goddesses, Baal not only engages in incest/rape with his sister Anat, but he has sex with a heifer, which gives birth to a son.

As with incest and pedophilia, when sex is divorced from emotional and spiritual union in committed monogamous marriage, it cannot deliver on its promise of unending and growing fulfillment and ecstasy. Therefore, it needs to be hyped by the titillation of new physical experiences.

Rape. A horrific tragedy all too common in some Muslim cultures is "honor killings." That is, fathers or brothers murder or severely punish their daughters or sisters after they are raped. Even though these women were helpless victims, they allegedly bring shame on the family name and are thus worthy of punishment. Not uncommonly, the perpetrators serve lighter sentences or simply get off scot-free.

Two issues in regard to the rape of women need to be addressed: the role of the woman and the nature of the crime. Although women often have a sense of guilt following rape, and although law enforcement officials and courtroom treatment often reinforce the sense of pollution and guilt, the victims of forced sexual intercourse are not guilty. If a woman is guilty of making herself vulnerable by carelessly exposing herself to danger, she is still not guilty of anything but poor judgment. If she deliberately entices through dressing provocatively or flirting and then refuses the advances of some man to whom she gave false signals, she is guilty of deliberately tempting another to sin, but still she is not guilty of fornication or adultery. The same innocence is true also of the homosexual rape victim and children

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sexually abused by family members. While there is no *guilt* for these victims, there is *shame*—something Tamar felt after she had been violated by her half-brother Amnon (2 Sam 13).

A great shift in scholarly opinion and public perception about rape is taking place. The traditional notion that rape is primarily the passionate response of a sex-starved man has been challenged. The sex drive is still involved, though. Typically, rapists attack women of childbearing age—though in 3 to 8 percent of the cases, males are homosexually raped.[26] However, the lack of sexual expression—that is, sexual frustration—is not at its root. Some studies have shown that rapists may be married and sexually active with their wives or, more often, unmarried but still sexually involved with others. One book, *A Natural History of Rape,* offers an evolutionary account of rape. It occurs when a male cannot find a mate and, because of his subconscious (genetic) drive to survive and reproduce, he forces himself on a female.

Why *do* men rape? While the biological drive and sexual urge are part of the equation, some may pin the problem on mental illness and a twisted sexual identity, perhaps as the result of sexual abuse in the home or a violent father. While we do not deny these factors of sexual drive and serious family dysfunction, to reduce the "cause" of rape to these factors renders rapists victims—like many do for the sinful habit of drunkenness. Sicknesses need a doctor's attention, not repentance and moral or spiritual transformation.

Further, despite protestations that pornography does not contribute to feeding the fantasies of the rapist, the statistics say something else—assuming the crime books have not been "cooked," which is increasingly common. For example, in one study of 155 convicted child pornographers, 85 percent of them later confessed to sexually molesting 1,777 young victims.[27] Whereas rapists could be capitally executed in the 1950s, today sex crimes are portrayed as less heinous, and sentences are increasingly light, no doubt due to the fixation on sex as a right in our society.

Rape is not merely a matter of violence, hostility or power-abuse. Obviously there must be some strong connection between some men's sex drive and their desire to rape a woman (or man or child). For example, *the*

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Chronicle of Higher Education reported on two studies in the mid-1980s. In one study of incarcerated rapists, it was clear that they exhibited "serious deficiencies in assertiveness and social perception." By contrast, sexually aggressive college males who engaged in date rape showed no such deficiency. As it turns out, "sexual aggression is most likely to occur when the man pays for and drives his date, when the victim or rapist is extremely intoxicated, and when the couple spends time in a secluded location, especially in a parked car . . . not on their first date with the person who raped them, but on their fourth or fifth."[28]

In other words, in the many cases of forced intercourse, the offense appears to be primarily a crime of sexual passion. It can be combined with violence or power, as when soldiers in wartime may rape women to demonstrate dominance over them—not to mention degrading and showing contempt for their male counterparts. So, given the sexually tempting situation, the man is not on guard against the passion that—at times combined with drunkenness—can often lead to forcing his way on a weaker person. That said, a woman is also accountable for her actions; she must not deliberately tempt by dressing provocatively or acting flirtatiously.

The state has an obligation to enforce harsh penalties on rapists as well as uphold the dignity of the victim. The state, in conjunction with its citizens, should create a culture that removes the stigma of rape or refuses to downplay rape as anything less than a gross violation of a vulnerable human being. The church has a responsibility to help the victim of sexual assault through the terrifying crisis and the slow and painful process of healing.

Transsexuality. The *International Bill of Gender Rights* insists that persons have a right to (re)define their sexual identity. This includes sex reassignment surgery for those who feel "trapped" in the "wrong" body. Yet can we truly separate our personhood from our sex? Who I am and what sex I am go together.

One of my (Paul's) friends was teaching a philosophy class. He showed a video clip of a man who wanted surgery to remove a leg because he felt like "a one-legged man trapped inside a two-legged man's body." The professor asked the class if he should have his leg amputated. The class thought

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this ludicrous and that the problem was in the man's *mind.* Interestingly, they knew how the body *ought* to function, that it had a certain purpose or goal, and that this normal-sounding idea was not an idea socially constructed by human bipeds. Then the professor asked, "So what do we do with a woman who claims she is a man trapped inside a woman's body?" The class was silent.

We raise the chicken-and-egg question. Is the problem the "wrong" body, or a damaged mind or soul? Does the body need adjusting, or does the thinking? Talk of a man's being "trapped inside a woman's body" (or vice versa) ignores very clear bodily realities and their purposes. Yes, hormonal imbalances can also contribute to the confusion, but very clear bodily realities should serve as anchor points and indicators of how to reorient confused sexual identity. As the doctrine of bodily resurrection reminds us, our bodies are integral to who we are.

Furthermore, our bodies are not our own; they are a gift from God and, for the believer, the temple of God's Spirit (1 Cor 6:19). So in rejecting our God-given body/sex, we do not merely reject the body we happened to receive from our parents; we reject a gift from God.

By what authority would a sex-change be justified? Typically, it is one's own *feelings* ("I feel; therefore I am"). So the man who "feels like a female" is therefore justified in going through with the drastic operation. The reality, however, is that any such operation is actually anti-creational; it produces a body incapable of procreation. In other words, we cannot change the created order. Our sexual identity is not up to us to decide. In trying to find ourselves, we may actually lose ourselves. Indeed, the fact that so many transvestites remain deeply unsatisfied with their sex-change operations should serve as a caution against such a procedure, hopefully prompting them to address the deep hurts and traumas of childhood experiences.[29]

While the genetic/biological aspect of sex is generally quite clear (though see comments on hermaphroditism below), one can experience gender confusion as a result of dysfunctional family or other social environments. This can result in same-sex attraction or feeling one possesses the "wrong" body. A commonly accepted view in today's society is that sexual identity is simply a social construct and not something given at

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birth. But if this is the case, then why all the fuss about, say, *women's* rights? Why press this if there is nothing intrinsic to or distinctive about being a woman?

Another cultural irony is this: we're told we can readily change our sexual identity by having a sex-change operation; biology can be altered to fit one's psychological frame of mind. However, as we saw above, those struggling with same-sex attraction are told that they can't ever change, that they were born gay: biology/genetics determines inner awareness of sexual identity.

Then we have yet another irony: "reassignment" surgery turns out to be the "luck" of historical circumstances—a medical procedure only recently available. Up until recently, "changing one's sex" was not possible, and people were more likely to grapple with the internal problem. Humans can now create themselves in their own image—the image of one's supposed real self.[30] And although we can't go into the topic in depth here, much of what we've said applies to cross-dressing as well: the solution is not, for a man, putting on a lady's high heels but coming to grips with problems and dysfunctions of the past.[31] Let us simply say that this version of sexual confusion (i.e., transvestism), which is more common in men than women, stems from an over-identification with the opposite-sex parent. Before the child reaches the age of gender identity, detachment from this parent feels like a profound abandonment. So the child desperately clings to objects such as the parent's clothing that serve as a "representational object," which becomes fetish-like.[32]

Hermaphroditism. In contrast to this inner, psychological condition surrounding transsexualism (or cross-dressing), a *hermaphrodite*—or "intersexed" person—experiences a very rare *biological* deformity, possessing both male and female sexual organs. Hermaphroditism no more implies that normative sexual definitions are called into question than congenital blindness calls into question the proper function of sight. Again, "true" hermaphrodites are rare. Even so, genetics determines sexuality, even if partially formed male and female sexual organs appear on one's body. There are cases of "pseudo" male and female hermaphroditism, in which maleness and femaleness are distinct—even though, say, a male may de-

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velop breast tissue due to an excessive production of estrogen. Both this and "true" hermaphroditism are biological aberrations that can be medically corrected.

We have looked at deviations from God's purposes in sexuality—purposes that are to be fulfilled within the context and safety of marital commitment. Having discussed these miscellaneous sexual topics (in addition to the biological condition of hermaphroditism), in the next chapter we continue our discussion of marriage, focusing on dating, romance and engagement.

Further Reading

Davidson, Richard. *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament.* Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007.

Keller, Timothy, and Kathy. *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God.* New York: Dutton, 2011.

Waite, Linda, and Maggie Gallagher. *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier, and Better off Financially.* New York: Random House, 2001.

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17

Romance, Dating and Engagement

Dating

Scripture makes no mention of dating. Different societies have different ways of selecting mates, and the Bible does not authorize one way as better than another. Each must be evaluated on the basis of how well it promotes the purposes God has in marriage.

In the Western world romantic love is the basis for marriage; young persons are expected to find their mate through the dating process. However, in many cultures finding a mate is a family affair with investigations, negotiations and contracts. There are, no doubt, advantages and disadvantages in both the romantic, companionship marriage in Western society and the rational, pragmatic and contractual marriage in other cultures. American young people do not often act rationally. Many of them take more care in buying a car than they do in seeking a compatible life partner. And marriage is such a weighty matter that the advice of godly, loving family and friends should be seriously considered. In a very real sense, a person marries a family, not simply another individual.

On the other hand, many of the family arranged, contractual marriages altogether ignore love and the will of the couple, especially the woman. Where there is little or no emphasis in the culture on developing a loving relationship, this is not usually considered part of the marriage and thus two of the three reasons for marriage are damaged or destroyed.

Neither pattern can be said to be intrinsically "right" or "wrong." In Genesis 24 Isaac and Rebekah were joined through family arrangement. In

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Genesis 29 Jacob and Rachel actually made a romantically based personal choice (though the permission of Rachel's family was required). Whichever method or combination of methods is used, great care must be given to be sure all three purposes of marriage are adequately prepared for.

In the dating system there are both advantages and disadvantages for fulfilling the three basic purposes of marriage. Advantages of this system might be the screening of potential mates before entering into serious engagement and the sense of security or "belonging" one can feel. There are some disadvantages too. If steady dating is begun too early and continued too rigidly, short-circuiting the development of friendship is likely—and friendship *should* be the building block for growth in romance later on; there is also the tendency to become attached prematurely without wider exposure to the opposite sex (just think of couples pairing up during university freshman orientation); and the greatest danger is the constant temptation of physical and emotional intimacy. As we have seen, intimacy without commitment is an outrage and a contradiction. A person who becomes totally physically vulnerable outside the context of committed love in marriage is saying, "I want you to be physically vulnerable with me, but I don't love you enough to marry you."

Furthermore, if entering and breaking exclusive relationships becomes a pattern during adolescence, it can be an emotionally poor preparation for marriage—in addition to increasing sexual temptation. In addition, the system usually leaves all the decision making to the young person who is emotionally involved and beset by peer pressure with little significant input from parents or church. Finally, the dating system tends to neglect the practical realities of sufficient education, motivation, an income-earning track record, savings, life experience, common interests and the like. However, it can hardly be said that this pattern is morally wrong, unless morally wrong attitudes or actions develop.

Romance and the dating system. The dating system is not ideal preparation for marriage because it introduces romantic feelings and sexual impulses as the context in which a person is to "discover" the other person. Friendship is a much better context for self-discovery and other-discovery, which encourages objectivity as well as enhances the natural development

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of a more exclusive relationship. Today's "hook-up" culture inverts things, looking for *romance* (and possibly sex) first, followed by the pursuit of friendship. This romantic pursuit often dooms relationships from the start because serious incompatibilities are not discovered because there has been no friendship or even acquaintanceship stage.

In our culture, the more secure path begins with *friendship.* This involves getting to know each other in church, Bible study or other group contexts; in addition, various settings such as church mission trips, community service projects and opportunities to learn about each other's family dynamics afford opportunities to know the other—settings when neither may be looking or feeling optimal or when the other's character is more readily revealed. Some refer to this process as "courtship."

Unfortunately, when single people go to a party, the tendency is to seek out those to whom they are physically attracted. While attraction (what some call "chemistry") is important in a marriage, one's more fundamental pursuit should be that of character and compatibility and like-mindedness. In fact, being on the lookout for attractiveness may actually *derail* one's quest for a suitable marriage partner of good character, wisdom and the ability to bring up children in a godly manner. And, of course, physical beauty fades over time (Prov 31:30), and what one is left with is a person's character—or lack thereof. If, in the course of things, a man and a woman share the same vision and outlook, they can advance beyond friendship toward marriage and the safety of sexual intimacy within that context. Becoming romantically involved early on makes an implicit emotional and relational commitment; it also raises expectations about physical involvement, all the while bypassing the cultivation of friendship and the ability to see the other's character; the dating system can often exaggerate the other's strengths and bypass serious weaknesses. Here we can learn valuable lessons from, yes, the Puritans. As J. I. Packer observes, "The Puritan ethic of marriage was first to look not for a partner whom you do love passionately at this moment but rather for one whom you can love steadily as your best friend for life, then to proceed with God's help to do just that."[1] Emphasizing the theme of friendship, Puritan pastor Richard Baxter advised choosing a partner who is "truly amiable."[2]

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Friendship and dating are not very compatible. Dating is a pointing-to-marriage arrangement. Friendship, unencumbered by romantic overtones—in the group, in the church, in the family—is a better context for growing as a person, particularly in the social and spiritual dimensions. But dating is with us to stay. So we must make the most of it.

Since the primary purpose of marriage is the oneness of two, the opportunity for two to get acquainted before commitment to a lifelong relationship has potential for good. One can determine in advance whether there is personal compatibility, an opportunity not available in cultures where parents make the decision and the couple meets for the first time at the wedding.

In dating, however, there can be an illusion of confirmed compatibility when actually the two do not know one another. This is because there are two kinds of static in the atmosphere of dating that inhibit true and full communication. The first confusing distraction is the erroneous notion of falling in love. In truth one doesn't "fall" in love—one grows in it. One may fall into "desire" very precipitously; one may "fall" into a romantic feeling, an excited attraction, and call it "love," but such strong emotional surges are not in themselves the real thing. True love is other-oriented while what is often called romantic love is self-oriented. They run in opposite directions. One is interested in giving and the other in getting; one is preoccupied with the welfare of the other person, the other is primarily concerned with personal fulfillment. Romantic affection can be part of good, genuine, biblical relationships. In fact, we never recommend marriage to one who doesn't have that excitement about the relationship. But by itself romantic feeling is not the genuine article, not very deep or very strong—not deep enough to satisfy the human spirit very long, and not strong enough to hold two people together when the going gets tough, let alone for a lifetime. Yet romantic attraction gives the illusion that all the ingredients necessary for a happy marriage are present. Further, "being in love" makes it very difficult to evaluate the other person as a whole person. As a result of the two illusory feelings of surging affections and sensual desire, many American young people get married for the wrong reasons.

In addition, our dating system can be tough on both the girl and the guy:

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traditionally, the girl has been the one to wait for an invitation, though this is changing, and the guy who sticks out his neck to ask a girl out runs the risk of rejection. In our culture, guys will often use love to get sex while girls will often use sex to get love—and so girls more frequently end up getting used. And psychological and spiritual harm comes to both.

In American society the escalating relationship from casual acquaintance to marriage usually goes through the following stages: time spent together (dating) leads to emotional involvement; emotional involvement leads to a feeling of exclusiveness and possessiveness (becoming an "item"—boyfriend and girlfriend); this mutually shared sense of belonging exclusively to another person normally leads to intimate talk and behavior. But the sincere Christian postpones the intimate talk and behavior until lifetime commitment has been made. A sure sign of maturity is the ability to postpone present gratification for future benefit.

This escalation of relationship is normally accompanied by a rising sexual desire for the other person. The danger of physical involvement without godly standards is that the couple does not remain satisfied with "just holding hands" and then "just kissing." And we have seen how sex before marriage is clearly a violation of God's standards for physical intimacy—standards that are for our well-being. Any attitude or action that lies in the line of rising desire from initial thought to consummation in sexual intercourse is immoral if it goes beyond the commensurate degree of mutual commitment (Mt 5:27-30). If the commitment is not there, expressed and mutually agreed to, then thoughts of sexual intimacy are a form of unfaithfulness, mental fornication.

"Do not awaken love until it so desires." In a dating relationship, a person has responsibility not only for self, but also for the other person. Love, not desire, must direct us. The pure-hearted, loving person will be careful not to arouse desires in the other person that he is not prepared to meet through commitment. One should follow the Golden Rule of dating: "I may marry a person other than the one I'm dating, and somewhere someone may be dating my future spouse; so I should treat the one I'm presently dating *in the very manner* I would want my future spouse to be treated."

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Couples we know who have reserved kissing for engagement or even the day of their wedding do not regret showing self-control; it only increases respect for each other and pushes the likelihood of sexual infidelity even further away. On the other hand, you will find plenty of married couples filled with regret and guilt for going too far physically before the wedding—and setting negative patterns for married life.

Only in the fullness of a marriage relationship can one experience the highest physical ecstasy, the deepest satisfaction, the growing fulfillment. If the relationship is only partial—primarily physical—it not only erodes the wholeness emotionally and spiritually, it makes the physical itself less satisfying. The relationship God designed is a total one—intimate identity in all of life.

The godly approach to dating would be to put the physical on hold until the whole-person relationship has matured to the place of lifetime commitment in marriage. Christian marriage should involve two mature disciples of Jesus Christ who have learned to be content as single persons but now come together to serve God as equal partners, as fellow heirs of the grace of life (1 Pet 3:7). The Christian counselor Larry Crabb has said that many people enter into a marriage as though it's a tick-on-a-dog relationship: "My spouse is going to fulfill all my needs." The trouble is that in most cases, there are two ticks and no dog! So the most important matter in preparation for marriage is not to *find* the right person, but to *become* the right person. The more practice one gets in self-giving love in all relationships, in sacrifice to help others become whole and fulfilled, the more solid a foundation will be laid for a successful marriage. The more the character is shaped into one of faithfulness, integrity and loyalty, the greater the assurance of a good marriage.[3]

Through personal experience and in raising teenagers, we suggest two basic guidelines for dating that spare young people grief and awkwardness. First, don't date until you are at a place in life where friendship can naturally develop into a flourishing, exclusive relationship. This principle virtually eliminates high school and most early college dating, which tends toward sexual exploitation and experimentation. The second guideline helps enforce and regulate the first: don't kiss until you're engaged—or

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even the day of the wedding. This is such a marvelous picture of dedication to purity that friends of our (Copan) family even made national news because of it.[4] By reserving this door-opening expression of physical touch, you will be able to develop, maintain, and preserve friendships while keeping your head clear about whether a person of interest is actually a mutually good fit. As friendship progresses, unclouded by expressions of physical desire, you will see the person for who she is. When you ultimately get engaged, have declared your love and kissed, you will have gathered a treasure trove of mutual trust and respect that you will enjoy and call on throughout your marriage. If these two standards sound too idealistic, we urge you not to dismiss them automatically. If you are way past this point in your experience, you can start again. Determine from this day forward that you will prize purity, honor your future spouse, and protect your eventual marriage.

Preparation days are to build purity of mind and body into one's thought life so that when the time comes, the total giving in a wonderful, exclusive, intimate relationship will be unsoiled.

Engagement

In the American dating system, there comes a time when a couple may make a commitment to get married. For the Christian, this is a solemn commitment to a lifelong relationship. It is the first stage of the marriage vows. The purpose originally was to provide a legitimate way for a couple to get to know one another, since society prohibited the private and intimate association of a man and woman who were not committed.

The sexual mores of contemporary society have changed so that dating seems to take the role once reserved for engagement, and engagement seems to be the trial period for marriage. But then again, marriage is not held to be much more serious than engagement formerly was viewed. But for the Christian, engagement is a solemn commitment and may be broken only for the most weighty reasons. It is better, of course, to break an engagement than to enter a marriage that was not meant to be, but better yet not to become engaged until one is quite sure of God's direction. When an engagement is broken, the trauma for one or both parties is

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usually proportionate to the seriousness with which the original commitment was made.

If engagement is indeed a solemn promise, then discretely speaking about sex and desiring sex with that person can no longer be considered immoral. It is no longer coveting something that is not rightfully one's own. So long as both are responsible and sensitive to the other person's stage of response, there need be no feeling of guilt. However, the physical act of sex is not appropriate or honoring to God until they become husband and wife, as we have discussed. Certainly there would be a sense of shame and awkwardness if a baby appeared before the nine-month mark after the wedding date. And if one would be ashamed or embarrassed about this anachronism, this itself serves as an indicator that refraining from premarital sex is good and right. Failure in self-control before marriage would be the beginning of considerable strain resulting from guilty feelings, blame and the undermining of mutual trust before marriage ever begins. But given the strong desire for sexual release during engagement, it would make sense to keep the length of the engagement as short as possible—as long as it takes to feasibly plan for a meaningful wedding celebration.

Therefore, it is wise for engaged couples to concentrate on knowing one another socially, intellectually and spiritually—establishing oneness at these more basic levels. Discipline is necessary. Physical expression of affection should be simple and occasional rather than prolonged and often. Otherwise an engagement, particularly a longer engagement, can lead to temptation, frustration and friction. Gratification delayed builds toward ever more wonderful fulfillment and the beginning of marriage on a solid foundation with no regrets.

Restoration After Failure

In our sex-saturated society the rate of failure, even among Christians, continues to escalate. Is there no hope for those who fail? Is the glorious gift prepared by God for the pure in heart forever out of reach? Though the wages of sin is death-dealing, and the destruction of the very things grasped for has set in, it is also true that the gift of God is life. Forgiveness and grace are the great antidotes, and for the truly repentant, healing begins immediately.

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Yet experience cannot be undone. One can never have the first experience again. And if the first experience is morally distorted, the pristine glory God intended for that initial taste can never be experienced. If the first experience was sinful and *was* a happy one, the problem may be even greater, for the memories are even more difficult to efface, and the shadow stretches long into the future. "The bird with the broken wing may fly again, but never will fly so high again."

Some people resent this concept, but it is a basic biblical truth. The result of sin is fully covered by Christ's atonement, but some of the results of sin linger on in this life. The drunkard who lost a limb in his drunken stupor will live with a stump the rest of his life. The selfish parents who alienated their children before coming to Christ may suffer a lonely old age. And so with sexual sin: the potential fulfillment has no doubt been reduced.

But forgiveness is real, and cleansing is too. So the failed person must gratefully accept this and then begin rebuilding a mind that is pure and a will that is trustworthy. If time for growth is allowed, God in his grace may erase many of the memories and provide a very fulfilling relationship in marriage.

Does anything need to be done about the past? Does the one who has failed have any obligation to the prospective mate? Since openness is a prime requisite for a healthy marriage and secrecy breeds suspicion potentially worse than reality, our judgment is that the question of the past should be faced before engagement. The person who has had previous sexual experience needs to ask two questions: *Would my friend want to marry me if she knew of my past?* And, *could I live openly with a sense of security and integrity if she did not know?* To be sure of the answer to the first, we know of no other way than to ask frankly, "Do you want to know about my past? Would it make any difference?" Since, in the heat of romantic desire, people may not even be honest with themselves, let alone with the person they may want to marry, the immediate answer may not be sufficient evidence of their true feelings.

If the person seems to want such information (which is rightfully theirs, in any event), we can recommend giving only the most generalized facts: "Before I knew you, I sinned by having sexual relationships with another. I

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am deeply sorry and hope you will forgive me." Further detail is probably not wise, but if it is requested, go only as far as is absolutely necessary to satisfy the loved one that all is past, that nothing of the former relationship lingers, and that God has so delivered that there will never again be infidelity. If the person definitely does not want to know, we recommend not speaking of the matter further. Deal with the Lord about any need you might feel to share. Sexual sins less than premarital sex or gross promiscuity should be left undisclosed unless specifically requested.

Though Scripture does not speak directly to this issue, it does speak of restitution and reconciliation. In the nature of the case, no restitution can be made to a future spouse for a past sexual offense, but full understanding and mutual trust could be advanced by the approach outlined above. The danger of ignoring the issue before marriage is that it may become an issue. Sin always has destructive effects. But at least the couple will be able to deal with the known rather than the unknown, and there can be no charge of deception. And if a person forgives another for such wrongs, then these wrongs should be left behind and not brought into the marriage either as a weapon or point of conflict. Puritan Richard Baxter gave this advice to married men—with relevant application for previous sexual failure or missteps:

> Stir up that most in [your wives] which is best, and stir up not that which is evil; and then the good will most appear, and the evil will be as buried, and you will easilier [*sic*] maintain your love. There is some uncleanness in the best on earth; yet if you will be daily stirring in the filth, no wonder if you have the annoyance; and for that you may thank yourselves; draw out the fragrancy [*sic*] of that which is good and delectable in them, and do not by your own imprudence or peevishness stir up the worst, and then you shall find that even your faulty wives will appear more amiable to you.[5]

If full forgiveness is not possible, a far deeper malady than sexual offense is evidenced and must be dealt with.

Further Reading

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18

The Question of Homosexuality

Biblical and Scientific Considerations

Sexual desire toward someone of the same sex and the expression of that desire in genital sexual activity has been known in most societies throughout recorded history. In the Western world during the Christian era, homosexual activity has been proscribed by law. This began to change when the British Parliament in 1967 decriminalized same-sex sexual relations. Following this, the gay rights movement became more public, spearheading a reversal of public attitudes toward homosexual behavior—from mere *tolerance* to *acceptance.* Historically, homosexuality was considered sinful and criminal, later a psychological illness (following Freud's lead), then a normal alternative (much like left-handedness), and finally advocated by some as a preferred way of life to provide the highest form of loving relationships (lesbians) and the best means of population control (male homosexuals).

The gay lifestyle and gay marriage are receiving increased attention in politics, the news media and TV shows (*The Ellen Show, The New Normal*) and movies (*Milk, Brokeback Mountain*). Pop singer Lady Gaga celebrates being "born this way," whether one is "gay, straight, or bi, lesbian, transgendered life"—although that last category doesn't quite fit the "born this way" theme. Even the online movie outlet Netflix has a "gay and lesbian" selection. Many orthodox Christians do not quite know how to respond except by citing Scripture verses. And they face further confusion when edgy, purported spokespersons for the Christian faith such as Brian

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McLaren and Rob Bell "come out" in favor of gay marriage. And to add to the challenge, the US Supreme Court rulings in June 2013 allowed gay marriage to stand in California and also struck down as unconstitutional much of the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA)—a defense of the definition of marriage as being between husband and wife.

Believers must be better equipped to think Christianly about these challenges without capitulating to the spirit of the age; they must also be prepared to lovingly respond to honest questions within their families, churches and youth groups; and as fellow broken sinners in need of God's grace, they must humbly listen and respond in truth and love to those in the gay/lesbian lifestyle.

From a theological context, an informal group of Anglican clergy and physicians produced a report in 1954 that marked a turning point, leading eventually to the Wolfenden Report and the modification of centuries-old English law. One member of the group, D. Sherwin Bailey, published the book that has become the foundational study for all later innovating theological approaches, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition.*[1] Since then studies by church people, church commission reports and church council actions have almost always kept pace with their secular counterparts and sometimes led the way in the "gay liberation" and "queer theology" movement. John Boswell was another scholar who advocated the compatibility of Christianity and homosexuality in his *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (1980).[2]

In 1968, Troy Perry, an ordained minister with a Pentecostal background, and a professed evangelical, left his family to form the Metropolitan Community Church in Los Angeles, which spawned many more churches. Groups such as "Other Sheep" and "Evangelicals Concerned" affirm that one's sexual orientation is a gift from God; the latter seeks to provide "hope, encouragement, teaching and fellowship to women and men seeking to integrate their faith and sexual orientation."[3]

We have seen something of the cultural, political and ecclesiastical backdrop. But let us examine more closely and carefully what Scripture actually affirms, then explore the claim that homosexuality is simply biological, and finally address the question of gay marriage.

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Biblical Considerations

Sy Rogers, a former homosexual and (for one and a half years) transvestite, grew up in an abusive home and was tormented by his peers. In the midst of his homosexual struggles, he would pray, "Lord, I have these temptations in my life. . . . I have these desires in my life. But I want You more." He eventually married, became a father, and is now a pastor and popular speaker on the topic of sexual temptation and wholeness.[4]

He tells audiences that when he was a practicing homosexual, "Christians tried to reach out to me." However, "they made a classic mistake; they tried to win a moral argument with me." Deep down, Rogers knew that acting on his homosexual inclinations was wrong, and he was aware of what God had to say about it: "I believed in God and His son Jesus Christ, but I also believed that God hated people like me. I wonder where I picked that up!"[5]

Rogers's story rightly cautions us against trying to debate the morality of homosexuality with those immersed in this lifestyle. This can come across as scolding and judgmental. Rogers's experience reminds us that while church shouldn't *affirm* homosexual activity—or adultery, idolatry, or greed, for that matter (1 Cor 6:9-10)—it should *welcome* anyone, including gays and lesbians, to discover who God is and to find his forgiving grace and healing.[6] While God loves us as we are, he loves us too much to *leave* us as we are. And the church should be the safest place for those struggling with same-sex attraction so that God's Spirit can shape them into the image of Christ. Yet, tragically, many professing Christians have created their own Westernized version of a leper colony known as "the gay community," and they can be harder on homosexuals *outside* the church than they are with the immorality *within* the church (cf. 1 Cor 5:9-13).[7] Yet Paul reminds former homosexuals in Corinth of the grace they had received in Christ: "Such were some of you; but you were washed . . . sanctified . . . justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor 6:11).

Some who promote a gay lifestyle will claim that Jesus and "the disciple whom Jesus loved" had a homosexual relationship. And David and Jonathan were gay, and Ruth and Naomi lesbians. After all, they embrace, kiss, and weep together, and David said that Jonathan's love was more won-

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derful than the love of a woman (2 Sam 1:26). Of course, such expressions of affection are common in the Middle East today, without any homosexual connotations. However, Richard Hays calls such stretches "exegetical curiosities" that just aren't taken seriously by biblical scholars: these examples "can only be judged pathetic efforts at constructing [biblical] warrant for homosexual practice where none exists."[8] Along these lines, some have suggested that the healed centurion's "servant" (*pais*) in Matthew 8:5-13 (cf. Lk 7:1-10: "slave" [*doulos*]) was a gay "junior partner." Now, we have every reason to think that Jesus would have healed a dying homosexual, but this is beside the point. This claim hangs on the thinnest of reeds: first, it is an argument from silence; second, it loads the general term *pais* ("servant") with more freight than it was intended to carry; third, the word *pais* is used twenty-four times in the New Testament, but without any suggestion of homosexuality; and fourth, *pais* could occasionally be a term of endearment without homosexual implications.[9] The Scriptures offer no indications—no stories, no metaphors—that homosexual relationships are acceptable before God.

What then are the biblical texts to consider regarding God's assessment of the practice of homosexuality? An appropriate text to consider would be Genesis 2:24. The fundamental understanding of marriage and a one-flesh union has been a husband-wife one-flesh relationship. Jesus (Mt 19:3-12; Mk 10:2-12) and Paul (Rom 1:18-32; 1 Tim 4:3-4) regularly appeal to God's design at creation "from the beginning" in order to defend God's ideal for marriage as the context for human sexual activity.

Now, some gay-lifestyle advocates assert that Jesus was neutral or favorable since he did not directly address the homosexuality issue. But an argument from silence proves nothing. There are many things Christ did not teach about directly: bestiality, prostitution, incest, rape, racism, to name a few. Does this prove he was not opposed to them? All were common in the Roman world. No, we look to the principles he taught and find that he reaffirmed repeatedly in the clearest and strongest terms that permanent heterosexual monogamy was the original and continuing will of God as the only legitimate context for sexual relationships. But there are more specific texts.

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Genesis 19:1-29 (cf. the similar incident in Judges 19). God's judgment on Sodom is sometimes interpreted by those sympathetic to homosexuality as not being because people had loving, committed gay relationships, but because this was attempted *gang rape*—a terrible violation of the custom of hospitality. Or perhaps the Sodomites wanted to *forcefully interrogate* these strangers to "know" (Heb *yāda'*, Gen 19:5) whether or not they were spies—to get acquainted but in an overbearing manner. The Hebrew verb "to know" occurs 943 times in the Old Testament, but only 10 times does it refer to sexual intercourse (e.g., Gen 4:1, Adam "knew" or "had relations" with Eve, and she conceived).[10] And where Sodom is condemned elsewhere in Scripture, it is for *nonsexual sins*—arrogance and not helping the poor and needy (Ezek 16:49-50; cf. Is 1:10; Jer 23:14). True, as interpreters, we *should* pay attention to how Ezekiel *does* emphasize Sodom's neglect of the poor and needy. And we Western Christians should be more careful about singling out homosexuality as wrong but neglecting the poor ourselves, which is also a wrong. And Gomorrah too is punished by God along with Sodom for its wickedness; so divine judgment comes *not merely* because of an attempted gang rape. But ancient Jewish literature *regularly* connected Sodom and homosexual activity and rape. For example, according to the Jewish historian Josephus, the Sodomites "hated strangers and abused themselves with sodomitical practices."[11] The New Testament reinforces the fact that one of Sodom's sins *is* homosexual practices: "the sensual conduct of unprincipled men" (2 Pet 2:7; cf. 2 Pet 2:10: "who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires"); "indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh" (Jude 7). This isn't a simple breach of hospitality.

Furthermore, "knowing" here is *not* "showing hospitality." The word *know* in Genesis 19:5 (and Judg 19:22) is clearly sexual, as the context indicates; the adjectives *wicked, vile* and *disgraceful* (Gen 19:7; Judg 19:23) don't sound like a mere breach of hospitality; the offer of the *women* in both stories (Lot's daughters; the Levite's concubine) has sexual connotations. Why offer women if the Sodomites' intentions weren't sexual in nature? Although the word *know* means "sexual intercourse" only ten times in the Old Testament, Bailey fails to mention that *seven* of them occur in Genesis

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(Gen 4:1, 17, 25; 19:5, 8; 24:16; 38:26). And the Sodom story itself mentions Lot's daughters who had not *known* a man (Gen 19:8)—that is, virgins.[12] Finally, the Greek translation of the Old Testament indicates the translators understood *know* in this context as *sexual relations;* they used *syngenōmetha* (from *syngenomai*)—the very verb used in Genesis 39:7-10, where Potiphar's wife wants Joseph to "lie with" (*syngenesthai*) her.[13]

Leviticus 18:22; 20:13. These texts refer to the prohibition again lying with a man as with a woman. Boswell claims that homosexuality *is* condemned in the Mosaic law, but because of its association with *idolatry* or *cult prostitution* (cf. Deut 23:17). These laws are in the same category as kosher food laws prohibiting shrimp or pork. This is a common but misleading argument. The Canaanites were punished because of *immoral acts,* not dietary preferences. And Leviticus 18 mentions not only homosexual relations (Lev 18:22), but adultery (Lev 18:20), rape, incest, child sacrifice (Lev 18:21) and bestiality (Lev 18:23). And even if the Canaanites didn't practice these things, such acts would have been wrong for the Israelites. Adultery is wrong even if it's not committed with Canaanite cult prostitutes![14] Surely, it is a mistake to treat all levitical prohibitions as being on the same level as not eating certain foods and not planting two crops in the same field. Note the emphasis on *action—lying* "with a male as with a female"—not an *inclination* or *desire.*[15]

Some will press the point that the Hebrew word abomination (*tôʿēbāh*) used in Leviticus 18 applies not only to homosexual acts (18:22; cf. 20:13); having sex with a menstruating woman is prohibited (18:19), and sex during menstruation means one can be "cut off" from the people of Israel (20:18). Isn't homosexuality then on the same level as sex with a menstruating woman? In addition to the points just made, we note that, first, the term *abomination* itself occurs about 112 times in the Old Testament and denotes all sorts of things and practices. Its first appearance is in Genesis 43:32, where it describes how the Egyptians would not eat with the Hebrews because this is detestable—something that is neither religious nor sexual. The same general sense of detestability is connected to the term *abomination*. In Leviticus 18:26-30 the term describes the general acts just identified, but in 18:22 and 20:13 it happens to flag homosexuality specifi-

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cally. Second, these passages on menstruation build on Leviticus 15:19-24, where any contact with a menstruating woman renders one unclean. So sexual contact would logically seem to be all the more a cause of uncleanness. (We noted earlier that both the emission of semen and the menstruation of blood render male and female unclean because they "waste" those fluids specifically created to give and nurture life.) Arguably, the prohibition against sex during a woman's period is a protective measure for the woman so that she does not constantly have to submit to the man's sexual demands.[16]

Romans 1:26-27. Here we read that God "gave over" women and men to degrading passions because they exchanged their natural function for engaging in unnatural, indecent acts. It is a clear text against homosexual relations, which are a turning toward idolatry away from the knowledge of God and his original creational purposes (Rom 1:23). Because of this rebellion, God withdraws his gracious influences ("gave them over," Rom 1:24-28) and allows them to fully pursue their rebellious desires. Along with idolatry and other symptomatic deviations from God's ordered creation, homosexual behavior is a clear indication of violating God's creational design for male and female to enjoy a one-flesh sexual union in the context of marriage (Gen 1:26-27; 2:18-24). So clearly does this go against God's created design, Paul says it is against "nature" (*physis,* Rom 1:26)—the way that God has ordered things (Rom 1:20; 2:1).

A common response is that homosexual acts aren't being condemned; rather, it is when individuals go against their own natural sexual orientation ("exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural"). So someone who is "naturally" *homosexually* inclined would go "against nature" by engaging in *heterosexual* relations. But such thinking is anachronistic: "neither Paul nor anyone else in antiquity had a concept of 'sexual orientation.'"[17] This is a recently constructed category.[18] And the words *exchanged* and *abandoned* in Romans 1 reflect not mere inclinations, but acting on them. Perhaps Paul is really critiquing wild pagan *sexual orgies*—or *pederasty* (adult male sex with boys) or *cult prostitution*; or perhaps he is arguing against Jewish hypocrisy (homosexuality goes against the Jewish holiness code, but isn't necessarily sinful for Gentiles, as some claim).[19]

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A few brief points might be helpful here. First, we should not take a *sociological* approach on these matters ("If Paul were alive today, he wouldn't say that acting on one's homosexual propensity is wrong"), but a *theological* one (Scripture's regular appeal to God's original design).[20] Humanity *as a whole* was designed with the capacity for heterosexual marriage, and homosexuality and adultery are deviations from that design.[21]

Second, some claim that Romans 1 was condemning only male temple prostitution.[22] However, *temple* prostitution was not practiced in the Greco-Roman world.[23] And if Paul were merely condemning male prostitution in general, he would have used the well-known masculine word *porneuōn*—or *pornē* for a female prostitute (1 Cor 6:12; 10:23). Others claim that the issue is not temple prostitution but pederasty (adult males having sex with young boys), but this is not so.[24] In addition, lesbian acts were virtually *universally* condemned in Paul's world; the temple prostitute or pederasty defense is irrelevant here.

Third, the logic of such arguments is that if someone had a "natural inclination" toward *bestiality* (animals), *necrophilia* (human corpses), *sadomasochism* (pleasure from inflicting or receiving pain) or *pedophilia* (children), this person can legitimately act on that orientation. Why not have a "loving and faithful *incestuous* relationship"? Some argue that *rape* for human males is "natural" and biologically based. In light of Romans 1, should a rape-oriented male resist or give in to his desire?[25] Some people may be born with a greater propensity toward alcoholism than others, but we would be wrong to encourage fulfilling this desire. Interestingly, pedophiles at the Virtuous Pedophiles website (virped.org) acknowledge sexual attraction toward children, which they claim is fixed; yet they insist that they should *not* act on that desire but show self-control or even receive therapy.

Fourth, we're all born with a natural self-centered tendency, but that doesn't mean we should assume that we have a "right" to fulfill those inclinations. We are all damaged in one way or other by the fall—spiritually, emotionally, mentally, physically, sexually. Simply because we have inclinations is not an argument for affirming them. And Scripture insists that sexual gratification isn't a right. Self-control is called for whether one is

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heterosexually or homosexually inclined. We are to honor God in our bodies (1 Cor 6:20); our bodies are "for the Lord" (1 Cor 6:13). In fact, one can faithfully serve God as an unmarried person, whether this is voluntarily embraced or not—and whether one struggles with sexual temptation toward the opposite sex or the same sex.

Fifth, Boswell and others have attempted to relativize Paul's strong use of "against nature" (*para physin*) in Romans 1. After all, doesn't Paul argue that "nature" (*physis*) teaches us that long hair for men is dishonorable (1 Cor 11:14-15)?[26] But clearly "nature," Boswell argues, must mean "culture"; so Paul's argument is simply not rooted in human nature, but in culture. Contrary to the idea that "nature" refers to "culture," Paul has the creation of male and female in mind (Gen 1:26-27). But Paul wasn't making a universal moral claim: "All men must wear short hair." After all, Nazirites didn't (Num 6; Judg 16:17). Paul was only noting that in Roman society, a male's long hair indicated *a denial of masculinity*; it even advertised one's homosexuality—just as a woman's short hair or shorn head indicated adultery. Paul's point is this: "All first-century cultures possessed means by which the polarity of the sexes was defined by various conventions; hair length was one such feature in Roman Corinth, as [1 Cor] 11:14-15 accurately noted."[27]

Sixth, Paul, along with other biblical writers, does not condemn same-sex *attraction,* but rather sexual *acts* outside of the husband-wife marriage relationship. In fact, no writers of antiquity, including biblical ones, had any conception of "sexual orientation"; rather, they talked about homosexual acts. What of Boswell's argument that the idea of loving committed homosexual relationships was foreign to biblical cultures but was even permitted within the Christian tradition?[28] Boswell is quite selective in his sources, including his use of the church fathers.[29] New Testament scholar Richard Hays argues that Boswell's biblical interpretation and historical revisionism "has no support in the [biblical] text and is a textbook case of reading into the text what one wants to find there."[30]

1 Corinthians 6:9-10. Paul states that fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, the *effeminate* (Gk *malakoi;* cf. the Latin *malacus*], *homosexuals* (*arsenokoitai*), thieves, the covetous, drunkards, revilers, or swindlers will not "inherit the kingdom of God." And he adds, "Such were some

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of you." Although homosexuality is a distortion of God's one-flesh design, this isn't singled out in Paul's list. Paul includes heterosexual sin (fornication, adultery), sins related to possessions (thieving, coveting, swindling), and—here's a broad one that hits close to home—*idolatry.* Why is it, we could ask, that Christians championing "biblical morality" on sexual matters go strangely silent on the New Testament's teachings about possessions?[31]

What does Paul have in mind by using the terms the *effeminate* and *homosexuals*? In the Roman colony of Corinth, the *paterfamilias* (the male head of the Roman household) might buy male slaves to use as passive sexual partners (*effeminate*); elite male citizens were socially permitted to be the sexually "active" participants—leading partners (*homosexuals*).[32] Roman law permitted this practice, but it was a crime for a slave to take sexual initiative on a male Roman citizen. Not surprisingly, the Romans didn't even come up with their own word for this despised passive activity, but their Latin word *malacus* was simply a transliteration of the Greek *malakos* (passive homosexual male). Yet Paul speaks quite *counter*-culturally: *both* homosexual participants are in the wrong—the socially despised *passively involved* ("effeminate") and the socially acceptable *actively involved* ("practicing homosexuals," TNIV). In Romans 1, Paul says that *all* homosexual relations are in view, including lesbianism.

What's more, Paul is even using the Greek rendering of Leviticus 18:22 and Leviticus 20:13. In fact, he even *coins a new word* based on these passages. The word *arsenokoitēs* comes from a combination of *arsenikos* ("male") and *koitē* ("bed"), which has sexual connotations (Rom 13:13, *koitē* refers to "sexual promiscuity"; cf. Num 5:20).[33] And we have no ancient usage of this word prior to 1 Corinthians. Every usage of the word *after* Paul by the Christian church fathers indicates *male homosexual activity,* and it is frequently placed on their "vice lists."[34] Here, Paul's use of two words makes clear that *both* participants—the leading and the following partners—are in the wrong. So Paul, in faithfulness to the order God laid down at creation, wouldn't parrot what was acceptable in Roman society.

1 Timothy 1:9-11. "Law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy

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and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers and immoral men and homosexuals [*arsenokoitais*] and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted." Here Paul applies the Ten Commandments to his contemporary context, and he includes "immoral men" (*pornois*) and "homosexuals" (*arsenokoitais*), emphasizing the socially acceptable active (as opposed to passive) homosexuality.

In light of this overview of the relevant biblical material, our previous discussion about God's purposes for marriage has been reinforced. That is, God ordained exclusive, permanent, monogamous marriage as the only way to achieve the full unity of two human beings, to provide children and home, and to reflect God's/Christ's own relationship to redeemed humankind. Although some gay activists are bold enough to claim the first and third purposes are available to a monogamous homosexual relationship, the whole thrust of Scripture is toward the union of one man and one woman as God's only way of fulfilling these purposes and that a "one-flesh" union is not otherwise possible. True, only a few passages deal directly with homosexual conduct, but the pervasive teaching of Scripture is to condemn all sexual relationships outside the heterosexual marriage bond.

Scientific Considerations

Alfred Kinsey's *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) was a watershed study in the homophile movement; it asserted that a large proportion of males (25 percent), though not exclusively homosexual, nevertheless had some same-sex sexual desires (thus being bisexual), though they may not have necessarily acted on these desires. He also said that 10 percent of white American males were "more or less" homosexual for at least three years of their lives (between ages 16 and 65). A study published in 1994 shattered the myths originally generated by the flawed Kinsey Report and perpetuated by homosexual activists and the media. A definitive study done on sexual attitudes and practices in America concluded that 2.8 percent of men and 1.4 percent of women are homosexual or bisexual—

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not the commonly claimed, but mythical, "10 percent."[35] A 2011 study showed that the number is slightly less—gays, lesbians *and* bisexuals comprise 3.5 percent of the US population.[36]

But why are any persons same-sex attracted? Throughout church history this was assumed to be the result of a willful, sinful, perverted choice. But with the rise of psychology in the last century, homosexual orientation came to be viewed as morally neutral, but nevertheless a pathological condition that was held to be the result of an inherited maladjustment (Freud)—with little possibility of changing sexual orientation.

Ironically, the first professional legitimization of homosexuality didn't come as the result of scientific research. Prior to 1973, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) had listed homosexuality in its *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM); it had maintained that homosexuals needed treatment. *Political pressure* from gay activists such as the National Gay Task Force provoked this turnabout. In fact, even in 1979, sex researchers Masters and Johnson said that homosexuals are "homosexually oriented by learned preferences," and as late as 1985 they declared the "genetic theory of homosexuality" to be "generally discarded today."[37]

Just as Christians have wrongly blamed "choice" for same-sex attraction, so the gay community commonly appeals to *genetics*—that people are "born that way." Despite the "biology is destiny" mindset, there has been, to date, no "gay gene" discovered. On the flip side, the "nurture" aspect of what contributes to same-sex attraction has been ignored within the gay community. Indeed, their familiar mantra is that people are "born gay" and that same-sex attraction is permanent; one can never be an ex-gay. But what does the scientific evidence show?

Psychiatrist Robert Spitzer had been a giant in the APA who advocated for removing homosexuality from the DSM in 1973. Yet in 2003 he investigated the claims of those who had been same-sex attracted but had undergone "sexual orientation change efforts" (SOCE). Spitzer concluded his research this way: "The majority of participants gave reports of change from predominantly or exclusively homosexual orientation before therapy to a predominantly or exclusively heterosexual orientation in the past year."[38] Now, the gay community that once praised him as courageous

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came to denounce him. Under incredible pressure he eventually "retracted" his conclusions, asserting that the data could be misinterpreted by people; for example, that they may conclude same-sex attraction is a choice or that same-sex attracted patients going through SOCE will always be cured.[39] Of course, Spitzer's own conclusions were fairly modest and uncontroversial. Psychology professor at Regent University Mark Yarhouse had spoken with Spitzer after his study, noting that Spitzer "often referenced the believability of the people he interviewed, as well as confirmation in some cases from spouses" about their gradual change from being same-sex attracted to opposite-sex attracted.[40]

Does genetics make *any* contribution to same-sex attraction? We do not deny there may be a partial physical contribution to the entire complex of factors contributing to same-sex attraction (see figure 18.1). However, this factor cannot be labeled "the cause" of same-sex attraction. For example, let's consider a common scenario about how physical endowments ("genetics") can contribute to same-sex attraction—but not in any determinative or overriding way. A young boy may not be very athletic. And because of his temperament he may have a strong interest in the arts or music or literature. In addition, he may fail to bond with his own father at an early age while only bonding with his mother. Then as he grows older, he is rejected by his same-sex peers on the playground or in gym class, is called a "sissy" or "gay," and receives no nonsexual same-sex affirmation verbally or physically (hugs, pats on the back). He internalizes this rejection, and when the boy reaches puberty, his desire to bond with the same sex becomes eroticized. Yes, we have a physical factor in the equation, but it is insufficient to account for same-sex attraction.

Dr. Elizabeth Moberly, a theologian who has counseled with homosexuals, has observed this same pattern. She writes that the need for masculine love and affirmation that doesn't come in childhood may, with the onset of sexual maturation,

> be inappropriately eroticized—with a pre-adult developmental lack carried into adulthood and inappropriately met with sexual activity. The adult homosexual does, of course, have choices—to remain celibate, to engage in sexual activity, or to seek therapy to resolve the unfinished business of

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childhood. But the homosexual orientation itself, though not innate, remains something the adult may not have chosen.[41]

Elsewhere, Moberly writes of one constant underlying principle that suggests itself "that the homosexual—whether man or woman—has suffered some deficit in the relationship with the parent *of the same sex*; and that there is a corresponding drive to make good this deficit—through the medium of same-sex or 'homosexual' relationships."[42]

For lesbians, the complexities are compounded by having grown up with male violence or sexual molestation; to their minds, the only place to find intimacy and safety is with women.

At any rate, one should not commit the "either-or" fallacy of creating false alternatives: same-sex attraction is due to *either* biological *or* environmental and volitional factors; it's either nature or nurture, either physically determined or a choice. While many in the gay community affirm the "only biology" side, many Christians affirm the "only choice" side. Instead of *causes,* we should speak of *influences* or *contributing factors.* Influences may include the physical, but they certainly include environmental factors such as family upbringing (distant father, overprotective or smothering mother), childhood experiences (peer bullying, sexual molestation,

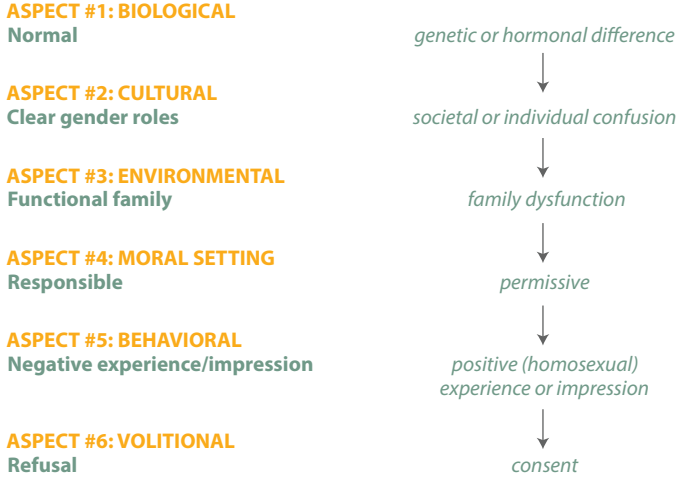

Figure 18.1. Factors contributing to same-sex attraction

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violence), reactions and choices (sexual experimentation), and the cultural environment (being taught at school or on TV that homosexuality is natural and normal).[43]

The late Anthony Falzarano, an ex-gay who would marry and have two children (he had been a friend of Paul's), said in his book, *Such Were Some of You,* that ex-gays are the greatest threat to the gay movement. Indeed, it opposes any who defy the gay "born that way" narrative—and thus that any can "change their orientation."[44] The gay movement does not strike us as open to the findings of scientific research; it reacts strongly to the legitimacy of any research that supports the idea that parental failure may have played a strong part in contributing to same-sex attraction. If the problem is *nurture* rather than *nature*, then change from same-sex attraction to opposite-sex attraction is theoretically possible.

Psychologists Stanton Jones and Mark Yarhouse document their research about "religiously mediated change in sexual orientation" in their book *Ex-Gays.*[45] They point out the common pro-gay strategy of "shaming and ridicule rather than serious discourse."[46] Another pro-gay strategy is to insist that any contrary research is *biased*; however, Jones and Yarhouse note, "there are few neutral researchers on such controversial issues."[47] Indeed, the fact that research supporting the gay lobby reveals that "neutrality" is not a requirement for "admission to the discussion."[48] Stanton and Yarhouse state that their research offers "evidence that change of homosexual orientation may be possible" and that this change may take the form of a reduction in homosexual attraction and behavioral chastity; it may also take the form of a reduction in homosexual attraction with what might be described as satisfactory heterosexual adjustment. Those who report chastity regard themselves as having reestablished their sexual identities to be defined in some way other than by their homosexual attractions. Those who report a heterosexual adjustment regard themselves as having changed their sexual orientation.[49]

Such changes can actually manifest themselves physically; medical science can actually detect a re-routing of the brain's neural pathways as the result of a person's establishing new life patterns. While the brain may be "wired" a certain way—perhaps through an array of childhood experi-

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ences—its neural circuitry can be changed. The previously cited words of Dr. Jeffrey Satinover of Harvard Medical School are worth repeating here.

> The neocortex is the part of the brain that we might consider as the seat of the will. . . . It is also the part of the brain whose connections between the neurons will be slowly modified over time, strengthening some connections, weakening others, and eliminating some entirely—all based on how experience shapes us. This ongoing process embeds the emerging pattern of our choices ever more firmly in actual tissue changes. These changes make it that much more likely for us to make the same choice with less direct effort the next time—and that much more difficult to make a different choice.[50]

Since homosexuality is not the result of genetic necessity but results largely from dysfunctional same-sex relationships in one's youth (whether with parent or peers) or from sexual or physical abuse, this also signals the possibility of greater healing and wholeness, which thousands of ex-gays have found—another indication that people aren't "born gay." Furthermore, longitudinal studies involving hundreds of thousands of teenagers have shown that same-sex attractedness for teens is not necessarily part of their "sexual identity." Indeed, most same-sex attracted teens found themselves opposite-sex attracted a year later.[51]

Pastoral Considerations

Presuppositions have a great deal to do with outcomes. Those who believe homosexuality is a normal and healthy condition do not seek "healing"; those who believe it is not sin, but rather a gift of God, do not need conversion, they assume; those who believe that change is impossible will hardly seek to change and, should they do so, could not be expected to achieve it. For these reasons, the homosexual community is adamant in its refusal to admit that a true homosexual can change.

What, then, should be the church's attitude toward the homosexual? First, we take it for granted that the Bible opposes the ordination of practicing homosexuals because it forbids the ordination of those living in sexual sin; it treats homosexual behavior as a distortion of God's creational design. However, repentant, converted homosexuals—even if they

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struggle with same-sex attraction—may exercise unreservedly their gifts and calling within the church.

Second, we must recognize the distinction between same-sex *attraction* and homosexual *acts,* including lust (which *is* a choice). Same-sex attraction, on which the Bible is silent, is not something a person can directly control; indeed, many same-sex attracted persons would prefer to be opposite-sex attracted.

Third, virtually all human beings have strong sex drives that the Bible holds may be properly satisfied only in heterosexual marriage. Homosexuals who are thereby frustrated are in no greater discomfort than single heterosexuals. To both God holds out the assurance of fulfillment either through marriage or by the grace to remain pure though unmarried.

Fourth, what of those who fail? God offers to forgive and accept, and so must his people. The church must accept repentant homosexuals who do not justify their sinful behavior but confess it and seek God's deliverance. Furthermore, the church must compassionately work with such people to enable them to become what God originally intended—conformed to the image of Christ, which may lead to other changes, such as increased attraction to the opposite sex; and single persons, whether same- or opposite-sex attracted, must sublimate their sexual drive into other creative channels. And Paul apparently knew some who had practiced homosexuality, yet he said, "And such were some of you. 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 Cor 6:11 RSV).

Fifth, while it is possible for a person's desires to change dramatically, a gradual process is more typical. Wheaton psychologist Stanton Jones claims that "every study of conversion (from homosexual to heterosexual) reports some successes, ranging from 33 to 60 percent."[52] Tim Stafford's observation, after interviewing eight former homosexuals who changed as a result of their walk with Christ, is perhaps more typical of the healing process.

> They were certainly not describing a quick 180-degree reversal of their sexual desires; rather, they described a gradual reversal in their spiritual understanding of themselves as men and women in relationship to God. They said this new understanding was helping them to relearn distorted

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> patterns of thinking and relating. They presented themselves as people in process, though they were very clear that the process was well under way.[53]

Some would argue that most of the reported cures, if the truth were known, were of bisexual people, not of hardcore, exclusive, "constitutional" homosexuals, but such claims go against the available evidence and testimonies of those who, from all appearances, have been exclusively same-sex attracted.[54] Just as people may struggle with the effects of child abuse all their life, so with same-sex attraction. But any changes that come often begin with a new mindset and a new determination. For example, stopping a behavior like smoking is the first step even if cravings continue. Some may say, "Ah, but you still have the cravings." But surely stopping smoking is a huge step, and this can lead to a diminished desire as time goes on. Likewise, stopping immoral sexual activity (hetero- or homosexual) is the first step in a Godward direction. So when a person who was once powerfully attracted to someone of the same sex—prompting a reaction of "Whoa!"—can come to the point where the reaction is more like "Oh," this is truly significant.

Finally, our identity should not be shaped by attractions toward the same or opposite sex; rather our identity should be shaped by the reality *creation* and *redemption*—that we are God's image bearers and are "in Christ."[55] The chief goal in helping those struggling with same-sex attraction is to urge them to greater Christlikeness—to seek first God's kingdom—*whether those desires subside or not.* The church should extend grace and compassion just as it should to struggling alcoholics—indeed, to struggling sinners, like all of us are.

This means that self-labels or the language we use ("this is my orientation" or "my sexual preference is . . .") can grossly distort reality. In one survey, females labeled themselves same-sex attracted for only three to four years and males five to six years. A study in 2000 revealed that females who had experienced same-sex attraction disliked labels, saw their sexual identity as fluid, and had actually changed in what they understood to be their sexual identity.

The most secure identity marker is who we are in Christ—not orientation, not sexual preference. Our identity includes more than sexual attraction; it includes whether you were born male or female; how masculine

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or feminine you feel; what you *intend* to do with the attractions you have; what you *actually* do with the attractions you have; and your beliefs and values about your sexual attractions and behaviors. According to Scripture, our sexual orientation doesn't hinge on sexual attraction, orientation, or factors that gave shape to this.

Furthermore, instead of emphasizing "orientation," focus on "identity." This enables us to keep an eye on the goal—Christlikeness—and focus on what we *treasure* and of whose kingdom we are a part. The proper focus should be transformation into Christ's image, not whether "orientation" or "sexual attraction" changes.

As we mentioned earlier, integrity or "authenticity" should focus more on who Christ is and what he demands from me—*not* what I have experienced, what I desire, or how I feel, which may be twisted by the fall and human sin. Same-sex attraction doesn't truly indicate "who I really am." Even if this is my experience, this is not the defining element of who I am as a person. If I recognize this, then I don't need to pursue "authenticity" or "self-actualization" by means of my sexual identity. Christians can remind their fellow strugglers that they can persevere and that healing can often be found. Perhaps they might even be able to identify a key factor that gave shape to their same-sex attraction and enable them to find healing—through repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation.

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19

The Gay Marriage Question

Former Massachusetts Congressman Barney Frank (who is gay) asked: "What difference does it make to you if my partner and I get married? How does it change your life in any real way?" Though Frank makes legalizing gay marriage a mere minor social adjustment, its implications are momentous. As we pointed out earlier, the cultural tide is shifting in favor of gay marriage, and this includes a growing number of professing Christians. Legal and social changes are taking place before our eyes.

Christ's disciples will have to exhibit greater courage and conviction on this issue.[1] Indeed, we see pressures mounting at a popular level. In everyday discussions, it is not unusual to be presented with these false alternatives: you either agree that gay marriage is a matter of justice and equality, or you are a bigot. That disagreement can be a matter of religious liberty or the freedom of conscience is dismissed without argument. At the legal level, persons of conviction about traditional marriage in the workplace, church and elsewhere are being sued, bankrupted and even imprisoned.[2]

How should the Christian respond? We have already examined the biblical material and offered some pastoral guidance for those who accept the biblical perspective on homosexuality. But simply to quote Scripture as authoritative to those who reject its authority is misguided. As we have mentioned before, Christians have the benefit of not only *special* revelation (Scripture and Jesus of Nazareth), but also of *general* revelation, which is accessible to all people: creation, conscience, reason and human experience. *Both* types of revelation enable us to know about the qualities of the one true God (Rom 1:20).

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Responding to the Gay Marriage Question

So we should be prepared to make a winsome case for traditional marriage that appeals to publicly available statistics and good reasons that reinforce the biblical viewpoint. Even in the face of personal attacks and insults, we must be careful to be civil, gracious representatives of Jesus Christ. So let us briefly consider the case for traditional marriage without appealing to "religious authority."

First, consider the myth of government neutrality. The very claim that government *ought* to take a stand on the gay marriage issue isn't a neutral claim. This is a moral claim—that the government has a duty to do something—and that *not* to do something is to take a stance. Consider the abortion debate. While politicians may attempt to evade the question about the status of the unborn by saying that this is "above their pay grade," if they endorse abortion on demand, they have taken a stand on the status of the unborn: whatever that status is, it can be turned into "a woman's right to choose." The same non-neutrality is true about gay marriage.

Second, the state has an interest in promoting healthy family life, and it should give priority to policies that promote this. The statistics are clear: as traditional marriage declines or deteriorates, state spending *increases.*[3] Statistics further show that not all parenting arrangements are equal; some, such as single-parenting, are just inferior to the traditional family model. So the state should promote structures that reinforce the traditional family arrangement, which has stood the test of time in generally producing stable, healthy-minded, well-adjusted children—and thus good citizens.

Children need *both* a father and a mother. But gay marriage necessarily deprives them of this. And studies reveal that gay or lesbian parenting is a less-than-optimal family arrangement.[4] On top of this, gay partnerships tend to be far more sexually promiscuous than their heterosexual counterparts; the range is between 101 and 500 partners,[5] and, shockingly, some gay advocates like Andrew Sullivan presume that sex with more partners can *enhance* the marriage connection between gays.[6] But this only creates further instability in the home and does further damage to children.

Third, when it comes to defining marriage, gay marriage advocates often emphasize that marriage is defined or constructed by society. And they

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assume that, whatever the definition of marriage, gays and lesbians should be included. But we don't actually get a *definition* from them.

So what *is* marriage? It is *a union between a man and a woman who permanently and exclusively commit themselves to each other, and this union is naturally fulfilled in bearing and rearing children together.*[7] The sexual (conjugal) act seals and unites them in their commitment; a man and a woman naturally equipped to bear and bring up children, and this is to be done in the context of a lifelong, faithful husband-wife bond. Note that this isn't some "religious" definition, as gay advocates assume. It is a universal one that is rooted in human nature that has been shared across time and civilizations.

Furthermore, marriage is a *comprehensive* union. It is a sharing of lives and resources at the deepest level. This sharing of life includes the organic, intimate sharing of their bodies. Sexual intercourse between man and woman *creates* a bodily union (what Gen 2:24 refers to as "one flesh"). Male and female sexual organs have a very obvious coordinated fit. This is very clear from observing the process of conception, gestation and childbirth. The male-female sexual union—unlike same-sex unions—is an organic unity capable of producing and bearing children. Yes, marriages for the minority in various cultures have been polygamous, and we have seen that this is an inferior and problematic marital arrangement. However, even in these cultures, there is no doubt that marriage is to be permanent and exclusive, and it is geared toward bearing children through conjugal (sexual) acts. That is, marriage's very definition involves members of the *opposite* sex, not the same sex.

Fourth, what do we say in response to the idea that societies simply "construct" marriage? This "social construction" or "revisionist" view of marriage is the main line of reasoning behind the push for gay marriage—that we can just define marriage any way we want to as a society. The revisionist view says that there is no core definition of marriage; marriage has no "essence" to it. One marital arrangement is just as legitimate and "constructible" as another. But if this is so, why *must* marriage include gays and lesbians *unless* it has an essence to it—an essence that has *not* been constructed by societies? Isn't marriage under the Taliban or Muslim sharia law just another construction? And why should those who advocate the

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traditional view of marriage be considered "bigots" if marriage has no universal definition or essence? What is "unjust" or "discriminatory" about *any* marital arrangement or law? By the revisionist's logic, there's no way to get marriage "wrong"! And isn't "justice" or "discriminatory" or "equality" nothing more than a social construction—a human invention? How could anything be condemned? This, of course, brings us back to the critique of moral relativism (see part five).

Fifth, laws are by nature discriminatory to some extent. No matter what definition you give for "marriage," it will differentiate between *marriage* and *non-marriage*.

Sixth, not all marital arrangements are created equal. There are marital and family configurations that are bad or inferior to the husband-wife union. While our hats are off to single parents, say, who try to care for their children and work hard to support their family, clearly this is *not* ideal. But there are parents of children born out of wedlock, which virtually *guarantees* a life of poverty, limited opportunities and social problems.[8] If we follow the revisionists, other "marriage" arrangements could be sanctioned in the name of "equality" or "non-discrimination"—regardless of any social harm it would bring.

So let us consider other scenarios. What about *group marriage*? Five men and five women, for instance, could call their group a "marriage." What of *incestuous* marriage? Consider the 2010 story of Columbia University political science professor David Epstein, who engaged in incestuous sex with his daughter—who was of legal age. Should the state promote *open* marriages, in which partners are free to have sex with other partners? Should the state discriminate against *temporary* marriage? This is a common practice within Shia Islam, known as *mut'a*; what differentiates this from prostitution (which *is* considered "sin") is agreeing to a price in advance with the official consent of a mullah. Then there is *bestial* marriage. Why differentiate between animals and humans? Would not doing so display the discriminatory view of "speciesism"—wrongly favoring one species over another? What of *polygamous* marriage? Soeren Kern of the Gatestone Institute has documented that European nations such as Britain and Germany give welfare support to polygamous Muslim families, sometimes sup-

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porting three or four wives with six or seven children.[9] Or why not allow marriage to include *marriage to self*? Clearly, changing the definition of marriage to suit anyone's preferences would weaken marriage and make it less stable for the raising of children. *Emotional desires* are not a reason to justify changing the definition of marriage. The very nature of marriage, which involves faithfulness and loving commitment, becomes weakened by grounding it on emotional desires. And even if children are in need of good homes and even if there are very kind and compassionate gays and lesbians, this isn't a basis for redefining marriage.

Finally, with the social landscape changing and increased legalization of gay marriage, this brings both *opportunities* and *challenges.* Christians have many *opportunities* for ministry in a world of broken, fragmented and dysfunctional families. We can open our homes to those who have experienced damage and brokenness and, by God's grace, bring healing and redemption through committed, loving, forgiving relationships. On the *challenge* side, we as a society have moved from legally tolerating to legally approving gay marriage. This is no light matter. Some critics claim that Christians are engaging in fear-mongering by using faulty "slippery slope" arguments: "If gay marriage is legalized, then traditionalists will be discriminated against." Actually, the discrimination against traditionalists like Christians, orthodox Jews and Mormons has *already* been taking place. We have ample documentation of job firings and lawsuits being taken against traditionalists for their "hate speech" and "discrimination" because they speak from moral conviction against gay marriage.

In terms of a political response in a democratic society, Christian people should without apology work for laws that enforce the biblical ideal, but they should engage in persuasion using public arguments with the view to the best interests of society (see part ten on the Christian and society). At the present stage of America's judicial and legal rulings, it appears that gay marriage will become a matter of "states' rights" rather than a sweeping national one. (How certain states voting to reject gay marriage will deal with gay couples "married" in pro-gay marriage states will, no doubt, become a contested issue.) In the case of state-by-state legislation that is left up to the vote of the people, we should remember that it would not be

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acceptable to the majority of the people to override their will by imposing laws they find disagreeable. In fact, an imposition by the minority (or even a lone judge) may do a disservice to morality in general, and this simply adds impetus to lawlessness. Yet Christians can and should work to defend the freedom of conscience for all. This includes the Christian print shop owner who out of conviction refuses to print lesbian wedding invitations—although he should print birthday invitations for a lesbian person since this is not a matter of the freedom of conscience. Nor, for the same reason, should a lesbian couple owning a print shop be forced to print anti-gay posters for Westboro Baptist Church—and Christians should defend the right to their convictions—but they should print birthday invitations for a member of Westboro Baptist Church as part of their service for the common good.[10]

As God's people, who have a *duty* to hope, we should not live in fear. While we can engage in politics and work hard to bring about change, as social reformers like William Wilberforce have done, we should not put our trust in government but in God, whose kingdom will never end.

Two Objections to the Traditional Marriage View

Two leading objections launched against traditional husband-wife marriage are the "infertility objection" and the "interracial marriage objection."

The *infertility objection* states that if marriage is between a man and a woman whose life together is naturally fulfilled in the conceiving and bearing of children, what about *infertile* couples who can't carry this out? Can there be marriage without bearing children? Yes. Historically, we have taken for granted that *consummating* a marriage after the wedding took place through *sexual union* ("coitus"). Notice that this uniting act can take place even if it doesn't result in the production of children. Engaging in the kinds of sexual activities that same-sex couples engage in don't qualify as consummation—a one-flesh union. "Gay marriage" actually turns out to be a contradiction in terms since it does not have the capacity to bring about a one-flesh union.

From a physiological perspective, a man and a woman are self-evidently structurally suited to each other—even if they happen to be infertile. Con-

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sider the analogy of baseball. A baseball team can be organized, practice, play in a league, but never win a game. Of course, they *have a strong desire* to win, but they happen not to win any games. Likewise, a couple's infertility doesn't prevent genuine marriage from taking place.

Beyond this, infertile couples contribute to a "marriage culture." *That* is a good thing. And if they should choose to adopt children, this would further contribute to the children's healthier upbringing since, statistically, children brought up by a mother and a father are better off on every measureable scale than any other parenting arrangement.

What of the *interracial marriage objection*? Gay marriage advocates will raise the point that interracial marriage was once banned (known as antimiscegenation laws) but now is legal. So traditionalists should "get over" their commitment to traditional marriage and "widen the tent" on this matter as well. However, the problem with this analogy is this: the issue wasn't about what *marriage* was but about *whom* one could marry. The very *essence* of marriage was presumed to be the same—a one flesh union between husband and wife. But antimescegenation prohibited *certain persons* from becoming husband and wife.

We have given an overview of the biblical view of marriage and sexuality—as well as deviations from this pattern. We now turn to the matter of the home—namely, responsibilities as spouses, parents and children.

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20

The Christian Home

"The family that prays together stays together" is a common slogan in Christian circles. Actually, it is equally true that, from a sociological viewpoint, the family that *stays* together *prays* together. Like the double-helix ladder of the DNA, whose strengths depend on one another, a healthy family life reinforces the faith, and a healthy faith reinforces the family life. Elizabeth Eberstadt documents this in her book *How the West Really Lost God.*[1] The rise of secularism in the West has undermined the integrity of the family and thus the strength of the Christian faith. Eberstadt illustrates her point by looking at rap in popular culture. Their themes of misogyny, racism, hostility toward religion and authority, child abuse and the like reflect a general rage in today's youth culture at their dysfunctional childhoods. For example, one song by the group Papa Roach ("Broken Home") mourns the absence of a father—in addition to loneliness, lack of direction and having no one to confide in. Their song "Last Resort" refers to suicidal thoughts, self-mutilation, inner emptiness and desperation.[2] And it is largely the failure or absence of robust faith in the home that leads to such an outcome in the West.

The home life is critical to passing on a vibrant faith to the next generation. Scripture gives much rich guidance concerning the cultivation of Christlike attitudes and behavior within the home, which is to be a small reflection of the body of Christ and a lighthouse and refuge in a darkened, hostile world.

Earlier, we considered male and female in biblical perspective. As we now consider the questions concerning the responsibilities of husband, wife

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and children in the home, we should here point out our complementarian-egalitarian differences. Roughly, *complementarianism* maintains that male and female are not only distinct, but each is obligated to fulfill specific biblically warranted complementary "roles" in the home and in the church. Moreover, a hierarchy exists in role—though not in nature or essence—such that men are called to be leaders in the home, and women are to submit to their leadership. By contrast, *egalitarianism* does not deny male-female distinctions (e.g., women's capacity to bear children and in most cases being better equipped to nurture children). Nor does it reject a proper sense of male or female identity (e.g., 1 Cor 11:14). Egalitarianism affirms that, when it comes to spiritual authority in church or home, there is no "male and female." Authority is shared equally by man and woman in their gifts, which the Spirit gives as he wills, and in their calling in the ministry of the church.

The Council of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood ("The Danvers Statement") is somewhat representative of evangelical complementarianism, which

> affirms that men and women are equal in the image of God, but maintain complementary differences in role and function. In the home, men lovingly are to lead their wives and family as women intelligently are to submit to the leadership of their husbands. In the church, while men and women share equally in the blessings of salvation, some governing and teaching roles are restricted to men. Evangelical egalitarianism claims, roughly, there is no intrinsic hierarchy of male over female, that authority in the church, the home, and the world should not be based on gender but on a person's natural and spiritual gifts. Egalitarians typically reject the patriarchy embedded within biblical cultures and seek to correct it in light of creation and the new creation in Christ.

Our approach here will be to devote material to McQuilkin's overall complementarian perspective and then to Copan's egalitarian one. Both of our approaches, however, call for "putting on" the things of Christ—humility, compassion, forgiveness, kindness, love—in word, deed and attitude. And we both recognize the full equality and intrinsic worth of every person before God, both male and female.

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Complementarianism (McQuilkin's Perspective)

The traditional or "complementarian" viewpoint, when adopted, has proved liberating for women in most societies, but in recent years it has come under fire as demeaning women. The feminist movement in America first targeted civil rights (the vote), then economic rights (equal pay for equal work), then employment rights (equal access to any position), marital rights (egalitarian marriage) and, finally, ecclesiastical rights (ordination).

Few today would argue against civil and economic rights for women, though some still hold that leadership positions in government and the workplace should be restricted to men. Because all people see through the lens of their own culture, it is probably hypocritical to condemn our ancestors for blindness to biblical truth—what C. S. Lewis called "chronological snobbery." (In what respects do *we* remain blind?) Yet it is difficult from today's vantage point to see how the oppression and subjugation of women could have been so universal for so long, often justified on the basis of (misunderstood) Scripture. Because of our past record of molding Scripture to culture's shape, we must courageously pursue biblical truth concerning contemporary issues.

When it comes to the place of male and female in marriage and the church, controversy rages. George Gilder points out that, in general, each marriage partner *can* do what the other does—aside from when brute strength is a key asset. Throughout history each *has* done the work of the other, when necessary. What is novel today is the idea that the members of each sex *ought* to do the other's work, or that it makes no difference for society who does what. Gilder marshals impressive evidence from the spheres of biology, anthropology, history and psychology to reinforce the complementarian—and what I take to be biblical—viewpoint.[3] Whatever may be said of empirical evidence, in my estimation the Bible speaks directly to the issue and it is not altogether on the side of contemporary Christian egalitarians.

In the modern world, the Bible has been viewed as patriarchal and sexist. Some feminists outside the church as well as many liberal scholars who reject the authority of Scripture yet identify themselves as Christians,

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accept this understanding of the biblical data. By contrast, evangelical egalitarians, who have a high view of biblical inspiration and authority, see these ancient embedded patriarchal social structures as fallen and thus distinct from God's ideal of male-female equality without hierarchy, as reflected in Genesis 1–2. Most early feminists, like Francis Willard, were devout evangelicals who believed the Bible is God's Word and defended their views, including the ministry of women, from the Bible.

Interpretation. First, a word about tradition: while the Christian tradition is not infallible, the longstanding interpretation of the husband as the head of the wife and home should not be dismissed lightly. It would seem that those who disagree would bear a greater burden of proof than the traditionalist. Again, this is not infallible, but it is a point worth considering.

What of the biblical texts themselves? The Magna Carta for those taking the egalitarian view is Galatians 3:28 (NIV): "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Is Paul advocating absolutely no differentiation when it comes to race, sex or slavery? Is Paul abolishing gender differences, for example? Paul could have added that there is no adult or child, no teacher or disciple, no elder or younger, but this does not keep Paul from elsewhere insisting that genuine distinctions and attendant responsibilities exist. In fact, he consistently highlights the unique responsibilities of servant and master, parent and child, teacher and disciple, elder and younger, husband and wife.

Creation order. The egalitarian holds that male and female were created coequal and that the subordinate role of the wife was a result of the fall. The curse stated, "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (Gen 3:16 RSV). Just as it is legitimate for people to work against the other results of the fall (pain in childbirth, hard ground and thorns), those who live under grace should reject this pattern and return to the original design of an egalitarian marriage.[4]

We see in the Garden, however, that man is created before woman and names her. Adam seems to bear the greater responsibility, as God rebukes him first, even though Eve first partook of the fruit; the New Testament suggests that fallen humans are "in Adam," our representative head (Rom

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5; 1 Cor 15). These texts suggest a hierarchy rooted in creation, not the result of the fall. George Knight observes:

> We should carefully recognize that the Bible never builds its case for the role relationship of men and women in marriage or in the home upon the effects of sin manifested in Genesis 3:16. The Apostle Paul appeals to the pre-fall creation order as normative—as he does in Ephesians 5, 1 Corinthians 11 and 14, 1 Timothy 2. (The closest Paul comes to this is in 1 Timothy 2, and there not as the grounds for the relationship but to show the dire consequences of what happened when woman disrespects man, her source, by assuming authority over a man without proper delegation of such authority.) It is God's creation order for the man-woman relation as evidenced in Genesis 2 (and also Genesis 1) that is normative in the New Testament, not the effects of sin as evidenced in Genesis 3.[5]

The created order suggests difference in function.

Old Testament. Egalitarians consider the Old Testament's patriarchal society as fallen and non-ideal: the husband was the legal point-person and ultimate decision-maker. However, even if Israel's society was overly patriarchal, this does not negate the scriptural fact that the final responsibility rested on the shoulders of the father/husband (e.g., Ex 22:17; Num 1:2; Deut 22:13-19).

Headship. Paul speaks of the leadership of the husband. Egalitarians and even a few complementarians have held that Paul merely referred to the historical fact that man was created first and thus was the source ("head") of the woman. Each mate, in turn, becomes the source of life to the other.[6] I find this interpretation strained, but an even greater objection is that whatever head means, it describes the relationship between Christ and the church (Eph 5:23), which is the fundamental model that the traditionalist claims for the husband-wife relationship in the home.

Submission. The key disagreement between egalitarians and traditionalists is the extensive passage on husband-wife relationships in Ephesians 5. What does *subject* mean?

> The word "subject" is a translation of the Greek *hupotasso. Hupo* means "under" and *tasso* means "arrange." It was originally a military term referring to the relations of a soldier to his commanding officer. Paul uses it in this

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> passage (Ephesians 5) to explain the relationship between Christians. It is best translated *relate yourselves to, respond to,* or *adjust yourselves* to one another out of reverence for Christ. . . . There is nothing in the fifth chapter of Ephesians that would even remotely indicate [that wives are to submit to their husbands].[7]

Once again, the traditionalist has not felt compelled by the argument because whatever *submission* means, Paul says it is similar in marriage to the appropriate response of the believer to Christ—or, in the above case, between a soldier and his commanding officer.

Of more force is the emphasis that the key idea in the passage is Ephesians 5:21: "Be subject to one another." This is taken by egalitarians to apply equally to husband and wife with no role distinction. The difficulty with such an interpretation is applying it in a parallel fashion to the parent-child relationship. And that, even for the most committed egalitarian, is difficult. To this idea of making verse 21 cancel the apparent meaning of the following verses, Paul Jewett, a staunch advocate of egalitarianism, responds:

> When he exhorts his converts to subject themselves to one another (5:21), he does not mean simply that in Christ everyone should be mutually submissive to his neighbor as an expression of humility. There is, in the Christian household, a certain order, and our subjection to one another in Christ is determined by this order: Wives are to be subject to their husbands as the church is subject to Christ (5:22-23); children are to be obedient to their parents as the fifth commandment enjoins (6:1-3); and slaves are to be subject to their masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart as to Christ (6:5ff.).[8]

The pervasive teaching of Paul that the husband should be the responsible leader in the home is so clear and strong that Jewett must acknowledge this. That said, other egalitarians will claim that, grammatically, mutual submission is linked only to the wife-husband relationship, not to the later section on the parent-child relationship. Also, most evangelical egalitarians do not cancel out Paul's calls to women to submit to their husbands, but rather affirm this and see it as one aspect of mutual submission.

By affirming my advocacy of the historic view of the husband assigned "headship" in the home, I must clarify that I do not join those "complemen-

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tarians" who extend this model as assigning exclusive "headship" to males in other contexts. I can find no Scripture applying this principle to government, the marketplace or even the military. In fact, we find a number of women in Scripture assigned leadership in those contexts by God himself.

Leadership in the church may be more problematical since Paul clearly forbids women to teach men (1 Tim 2:12). But then I discover in Scripture a woman (Priscilla) instructing a leading preacher of the day over a period of time (Acts 18:26). We find young women anointed by the Spirit to preach (Acts 2:17). Maybe Phillip's four daughters (Acts 21:9) were among those? Also, it seems that Junia is described as a co-apostle (Rom 16:7).

So what do we do with Paul's prohibition? We can't join an early feminist, evangelical New Testament scholar, Paul Jewett, who didn't try to exegete himself out of the passage but simply proclaimed the apostle Paul in error.[9]

So what do I conclude? When biblical teaching conflicts with contrary historical example, the instruction takes precedence. Yet in such cases I tend to refrain from dogmatically rejecting those who side with biblically ordained examples.

Application. Paul's meaning seems clear enough, but did God intend this approach to marriage for today, or was it the cultural application of eternal truth to the transient culture of that day?

> There are several biblical texts which suggest that men should rule over women. But there are also several texts that indicate that hereditary monarchs should rule over commoners and that masters should rule over slaves. . . . All those texts reinforced the existing social order of Paul's first-century Roman world. . . . It may have seemed prudent to Paul to avoid relatively less crucial challenges to the status quo.[10]

Biblical egalitarians contend that this teaching is no longer binding in the form Paul gave it because Paul in the same context taught about slavery, and all agree that the institution of slavery is not universal and permanent.

Thus, the parallel to slavery is crucial to the argument. Scripture does reveal that slavery is not the ideal, both in Old Testament laws forbidding the enslavement of fellow Israelites, the law of Jubilee and other indica-

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tions. Some might point to what Paul himself said in his letter to Philemon concerning Onesimus—yet even here there is scholarly dispute. Some contend that Onesimus was not a runaway slave. After all, there are no "flight" verbs, and the runaway-slave interpretation did not arise until the fourth century; rather, he was an estranged Christian brother who should be received back "no longer as a slave"—the same language as Galatians 4:7: "you are no longer a slave, but a son."[11] In fact, Paul encouraged slaves to gain their freedom if they could (1 Cor 7:21). At any rate, most agree that the institution of slavery was not established by God, was never commanded by God, was never approved by God, and was only regulated by God to ameliorate the fallen human condition. Therefore, the abolition of slavery is not only permissible by biblical standards but demanded by them.

But the parallel between husband-wife relations and slave-master relations will not hold. It would be necessary to advocate the abolition of both institutions, not the abolition of one and the abolition of submission in the other. Actually, the instruction on relationships within both institutions is normative. In a society where slavery exists, the Pauline instructions for slave and master would be as fully authoritative now as the day he gave them. But the institutions are not parallel. Marriage, unlike slavery, was God's own idea, the fundamental human relationship in his design. The institution of marriage is normative for all peoples of all time, and therefore the instructions for how that marriage is to be conducted are as normative as the institution itself. The parallel is being drawn by egalitarians between the *system* of slavery and the *conduct* of marriage and thus is fallacious. The institutions are not parallel: one God-ordained, the other human-initiated; one permanent, one crying out for abolition.

Even if the parallel were valid, what of the relationship Paul deals with in Ephesians 6 (between the marital and slavery passages)—namely, parent-child? Some secular human-rights activists are calling for the abolition of parental authority as well. Biblical egalitarians do not agree that a child's submission to her parents ought to be abridged (although they would qualify this point). But if one parallel is mandatory, why not the other?

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When Paul speaks of the husband as head of the home and of the wife as submissive in her relationship, he is advocating what today we might call responsible leadership. God's instruction concerning the home, the church, government and the world of work all speak of God's own authority delegated to human authorities. These human authorities are not established to provide unconditional acceptance with a nonjudgmental attitude, to preside over a democratic vote, nor merely to give good advice. They are charged with responsibility to legislate, administer, adjudicate. Though the Son is equal to the Father, he submits to the Father's will in his earthly mission (Jn 5:18-23, 30; 14:28; 1 Cor 15:24-38).

Does submission mean inferiority? Is Christ inferior or self-destructive because he prays "not My will, but Yours be done?" Is the Christian, by yielding to the lordship of Jesus Christ, in danger of self-destruction? Or under the Mosaic law, only Levites could be priests—even though they were in every way equal to their fellow Israelites. Or in human relationships, who is superior, an unknown college president or a world-renowned professor who serves under him? Marriage calls for role distinction, but not for an inferior-superior relationship. Interchangeability of roles may not bring freedom so much as confusion and marriage failure.

Which is more important in holding a car together—the nuts or the bolts? What if all the nuts went on strike because they were discriminated against and refused to serve if they couldn't function as bolts? They would be unfulfilled, the bolts also would be useless, but worst of all the whole organization would come to pieces and its purpose go unfulfilled. Jesus and Paul claimed that each person is of incalculable value, in whatever role God may have for him. Freedom and fulfillment come from fitting one's role, not demanding someone else's.

The Bible assigns the husband a role of loving leader and the wife the role of loyal completer. The root problem in marriage is the unwillingness of each to accept the role for which he or she was designed. Each has failed *specifically* in his and her own responsibility.

However, while the roles are clear in principle, these will certainly be expressed differently in different cultures. A loyal support role for a Japanese wife might seem like demeaning subservience for a Swedish wife;

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leadership in an Italian home might seem like unloving arrogance in an American. But success in marriage is the magnificent gift of God to those who accept, in whatever culture, the role designed by God.

Every fallen human culture stands under the judgment of God for its distortion of marriage roles ordained of God. The task of the church is to listen carefully to the cries of the oppressed and look more deeply to see what God would say. The quest for self-fulfillment in our culture affects families, including within the church itself.

There is a legitimate alternative to accepting biblical marriage roles: Stay out of marriage! There are many things worse than singleness, and one of them is a marriage filled with tension because of role confusion. The single person is not bound by husbandly or wifely roles and responsibilities. *But if a person chooses to marry in the Lord, he is choosing a specific role.* What, then, are the roles of each as taught in Scripture?

Responsibility of the husband. *Loving.* The first—and predominant—responsibility for the husband is to love his wife. And the standard in that relationship is the way Christ loved the church (Eph 5:22-23). He loved the church through total sacrifice. Although no mere mortal can attain this goal fully, this is the standard by which a man must ever evaluate his performance as a husband. How does Christ love the church? There are many ways to consider this, but think of what Paul alludes to, the dark hours on the cross when he gave his life. Five of the seven sayings were on behalf of others.

For example, Jesus cried out, "Father, forgive them." Forgiveness is the standard—and he forgave even when they did not ask for it. Longsuffering, forbearance. Even when she usurps my role? Yes, even when she crucifies you—that is God's kind of loving.

Again, he said, "Today you will be with me in Paradise." He accepted the sinner as he was, the ultimate failure, hanging on a cross. So with one's wife, fastidious or sloppy, disorganized or airbrush-perfect, young and beautiful or aging and overweight—acceptance. By grace, introduce her to paradise. When caring for family, he said: "Mother, here is your son" and "Son, here is your mother." Incredibly selfless, kind and gentle, he makes provision for all her needs, all her weaknesses, even while he himself is in mortal agony.

Leading. The husband is responsible for his wife, and this involves lead-

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ership. But leadership is not arrogant machismo—he must never have a bullying or domineering spirit (1 Pet 3:7). Rather, he must gently lead, modeling the standard of loving well. In a Christian American marriage characterized by open communication and loving sacrifice of personal prerogatives, consensus is the normal way for decision making, and "pulling rank" is rarely if ever necessary. Nevertheless, the husband is leader and responsible to God for the direction the marriage goes. Even if the husband is more introverted, this should not be confused with passivity. A quieter husband can still initiate when it comes to praying together or reading the Bible with the family at the dinner table.

Providing and protecting. Closely associated with his wife's spiritual welfare is provision for the full development of a wife's intellectual potential. For the husband to live on the sacrifice of his young wife while he goes to school and then leave to her the full load of caring for children at home with no opportunity for growth is to fail in loving provision. Her emotional health is his responsibility as well. Provision physically means protection from harm and from the assaults of the world outside. Of course, physical abuse is utterly out of the question, and the husband must never touch his wife in anger—ever.

Of course there are other, more deadly, ways of harming—verbal abuse, psychological wounds—and from all these his responsibility is to protect her. If any home is caught up in un-Christlike behavior, the wife should seek outside help if the husband is not man enough and Christian enough to seek it.

Another physical provision is for sexual fulfillment (1 Cor 7:3-5). The husband who is consistently gratified sexually but does not take the time and care to provide fulfillment for his wife wrongs her grievously. Radical for Paul's day was to say that the husband's body belongs to his wife (1 Cor 7:4). True mutual sexual intimacy enhances and nurtures relational intimacy in marriage.

Material provision is a husband's responsibility (1 Tim 5:8). This does not mean that the wife may not earn income, nor that it is wrong for her to earn more than he does or provide more for the family from her estate. But these blessings do not relieve him of ultimate responsibility.

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Finally, provision includes social relationships. A husband may not dictate the extent of his wife's social involvement outside the home.

Limits of responsibility. Although loyalty to one's wife takes precedence over loyalty to parents, to children, or to anyone else, loyalty to God takes highest precedence. When and how is one to "hate his wife" (Lk 14:26) or behave as if he were unmarried (1 Cor 7:29)?

A new idolatry has crept into evangelical thinking, the idolatry of family. All resources of time and money are reserved for family above church, family above service to God, family above work, family above national security. This attitude has come as a reaction to earlier attitudes that put wife and children last. Correction was desperately needed back then. But there are times when the interests of the kingdom of God demand that a husband "hate" his wife and children—that is, that he choose to sacrifice some potential benefit of theirs for the sake of fulfilling God's purposes in the world. The order of Scripture is clear: self-sacrifice as needed for the welfare of wife and children; family sacrifices as needed for the welfare of the kingdom of God. On the other hand, we must take care not to pit family against God, but rather to work to serve God together—such as showing hospitality and taking in foster children or adopting them.

Responsibility of the wife. *Loving.* The first responsibility of the wife, as of the husband, is to live in love (Tit 2:4-5). In biblical terms this means to consistently choose to act for the welfare of the other at whatever personal sacrifice. When both partners are committed to this way of life, the vast majority of marital problems are solved.

Managing the home. "Do you work or stay at home?" What a question to ask a mother! Being a stay-at-home mom is a demanding full-time job. She is a "worker at home" (Tit 2:5). Though very gratifying, this task is often far more demanding and emotionally draining than an office job! Paul uses the term *oikodespotēs*—a manager of the home (1 Tim 5:14). Though this task is in conflict with much contemporary Western thinking, Paul clearly states that the wife is responsible to maintain the home (see also Proverbs 31, which is not in the form of a command but of a description of an ideal wife). This principle does not imply that a loving husband will refuse to

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participate in household responsibilities, but that the primary responsibility is the wife's.

Loyal completing. Her role is to be a complement to her husband. She is the accompanist providing for a successful team performance through reinforcing her husband. "Submission" includes honor and obedience (Eph 5:22-33; Tit 2:5; 1 Pet 3:1-7).

In a modern, liberated society, this often is a cross a wife is unwilling to bear. By rejecting it, however, she does not find freedom and fulfillment, but diminishing fulfillment, if not destruction, of that which might have been her most precious possession. The sacrificial love demanded of the husband is precisely the response a "natural-born" leader does not want, and the submission demanded of the wife is exactly what the proud, autonomous person does not want. Actually, the standard is higher for the husband, if anything. Christ's kind of loving is far more demanding of sacrifice than Sarah's kind of submission.

There are exceptions to the law of submission. No Christian woman may obey a husband who would cause her to sin. Leadership in any such direction must be rejected. On the other hand, if she is forced to do wrong, it seems that God holds the husband responsible, not the wife (Num 30:15). I assume Sapphira was not forced by Ananias to lie about their gift in Acts 5:1-11 since God certainly held her responsible. Furthermore, if conditions obtain that would make a divorce legitimate on biblical terms, a wife is not bound. Finally, on the basis of the Bible authorization of self-defense, I hold that a woman who is in physical danger or whose children are in physical danger may remove herself and her children from such danger. Some separation is not only justified but demanded.

Sex. The wife, like the husband, is to be available for the husband's sexual needs (1 Cor 7:4). Creative partners will find ever growing ways to pleasure each other. Paul did not want Christians tempted outside the home by lack of sexual fulfillment inside the home.

Egalitarianism (Copan's Perspective)

In contrast to my fine coauthor, I see Scripture advocating a view that encourages mutuality without a hierarchy based on gender (the "egalitarian"

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view). In marriage, *both* husband and wife are responsible for important decision-making matters. And in various areas one spouse may defer to the insights and skills of the other. For example, consider the traditional expectations of the wife "managing the home"; the husband may have more of an aesthetic eye, be a more enthusiastic cook, have better organizational skills, and be more of a "green thumb." In such cases, spouses would be foolish not to be flexible about roles that permit them to benefit from their respective gifts. The most prominent description of an ideal wife in all of Scripture is Proverbs 31. There God approves of a wife who engages in leadership outside the home; she takes economic and charitable initiative. This suggests that God approves of the husband's leadership in a way that also applies to the wife.

In the New Testament, we have mutuality without hierarchy. For example, Paul and Luke break with Greek custom, identifying Priscilla's name before her husband's in every passage about their ministry together, including their instructing the great preacher Apollos in the way of the Lord more accurately (Acts 18:26). In Romans 16, Paul makes clear his approval of women in church leadership: seven of the ten people he names—and identifies their ministry—are women; two of the three men he names here are listed with their wives as a couple active in ministry; and the only person identified by name in the New Testament who has a title of local church leadership is a woman, "Phoebe, deacon of the church of Cenchrea" (Rom 16:1 NIV). Indeed, Paul refers to *Junia* (Rom 16:7)—a female name, not a male one (Junias), as some translations misleadingly suggest—alongside Andronicus. Paul calls them "my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles." Not a few scholars conclude that Junia is herself regarded as an apostle—in the sense of "missionary" (cf. Phil 2:25, where Epaphroditus is an "apostle").

The subject of both Paul's lists of qualifications of overseers (1 Tim 3:1-7) and elder (Tit 1:6-9) is "anyone" (1 Tim 3:1, 5; Tit 1:6), and neither list has any masculine pronouns (*he, his, him*) or anything else that would exclude women, contrary to most English translations (although CEV and CEB translate them correctly without these masculine pronouns). And even complementarian scholars such as Thomas Schreiner, Douglas Moo and

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Gordon Hugenberger acknowledge that the phrase "one woman man" does not exclude women from these offices.

As we read the New Testament, it is clear that Christ is the model for *all* Christians, not just husbands (cf. 1 Cor 11:1; Gal 4:19; Eph 5:1-2; 1 Pet 2:21). There are twelve issues related to husband-wife relationships in 1 Corinthians 7, and all of them indicate mutuality and reciprocity, including spiritual leadership.

Aside from the woman's bodily design for bearing and nursing children, social science studies show that there is far greater disparity among women than between women and men on average as regards competence to care for children and bond with them, in nurturing dispositions, and in relational insights.[12] Some women have risen to the challenge of meeting the same-strength competencies of men for, say, the task of firefighting. It just makes sense that husbands and wives should, with mutual agreement and flexibility each assume the sometimes-overlapping responsibilities for which they are physically, psychologically and even vocationally suited and in which they are interested and can flourish—without, of course, compromising the children's parental care and well-being. At a couple of points in our married life, my "excellent wife" Jacqueline was the main breadwinner—once right after my seminary training and another time during my PhD program so that I could be a full-time student, which afforded me more time with our young children. It seems to me that one should not simply assume exclusive roles.

Below I give an embarrassingly brief overview of key texts and topics related to gender responsibilities.

"No male and female." In Galatians 3:28, Paul cites Genesis 1:27 that there is "no male and female" in Christ. It appears that Paul isn't simply focusing on one's standing before God to the exclusion of relationships in the church. That is, social, economic and sexual barriers "before God" are not only eliminated with regard to salvation, but also in the church's relationships as well. To speak of "fixed gender roles" or "non-interchangeable roles" seems to add confusion to what Paul is saying here.

Think of how Paul rebuked Peter in Antioch (Gal 2) because Peter had acted as though Jewish-Gentile divisions were to be maintained within

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the church. This rebuke suggests that more than "salvation before God" is at issue, affecting a range of relationships within the church. The upshot of Paul's message is that in society, there may be Jew-Gentile, slave-free and male-female divisions, but not in Christ—and not in his body, the church. We should add that Paul is not eliminating *gender* distinctions between male and female, nor does Paul open wide the gate to endorse sinful behavior ("there is neither adulterer or non-adulterer, homosexual or non-homosexual").

Some may claim that an egalitarian view does not take biblical authority seriously. It seems to me that the matter is one of hermeneutics (interpretation) rather than authority. For example, which text(s) should be foundational for our consideration—say, Galatians 3:28 or 1 Timothy 2? True, it's not always easy to sort out what is cultural and what is normative. However, it seems to me that Galatians 3:28 is a more fundamental, general text whereas 1 Timothy's concerns regarding women are situation specific. First Timothy addresses a particular problem involving outspoken, misled "liberated" women who are dishonoring their marriages and husbands; they are putting down the tasks of childbearing and being (what we call today) a "stay-at-home mom."

Or again, why should we treat women's "learning in quietness" (1 Tim 2:13) as permanently relevant, but not a major portion of the same book about rules to help materially support widows over sixty or to require young widows to get married (1 Tim 5)? Starting with the priority of one text over another should not simply be assumed but defended.[13]

Creation and fall. As I see it, the creation text of Genesis 1–2 does not give man inherent authority over woman. Rather, *both* man and woman are created in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27) and *together* receive dominion over animals and the rest of creation (Gen 1:28; cf. Ps 8). Note too that the man was made *after* the animals, which would seem to undermine an argument for hierarchy based on chronological priority. Even when the *man* (Heb *'îš*) "names" his wife *woman* (Heb *'išâ*), this is a joyful expression of relatedness, not a sign of superiority. And woman comes from man's *side*—an equal. Furthermore, no individual "roles" were assigned to them before the fall—only co-ruling with God and worshiping him together.

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But after the fall, the tendency would be for the man to rule the woman: "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you" (Gen 3:16). In the post-fall Old Testament world, patriarchy would become a social structure that departed from the equality at creation—just as warfare and servitude were interwoven with ancient Near Eastern life. But as the Scriptures progress, God's ideal of the male-female equality established at Genesis 1–2—to be restored in the new creation—is viewed as normative.

Silence, head-coverings and public worship. Paul indicates that in public worship, women can pray and prophesy (1 Cor 11:5, 13; Acts 2:18). (The New Testament gift of prophecy is revelatory—reporting what God brings to mind.) Even so, in the same book Paul exhorts women to be silent (1 Cor 14:34-35). Some scholars view this as referring to a prohibition as a matter of citing a false prophecy; others argue that this was a scribe's insertion in the margin of the text. Even if it is original, one should note Craig Keener's observation: "Whatever else Paul may mean . . . he cannot mean complete silence, because earlier in the same letter he allowed women to pray and prophesy (1 Corinthians 11:5). The problem seems not to be teaching, but rather that the women are learning—too loudly."[14] What then is the "silence" part about? Paul urges women to show respect to husbands in public worship. Being in a less-formal household setting, they are not to ask interrupting questions that intrude on the worship of others but should rather confer with their husbands when at home.

Another way of showing respect includes a woman wearing her hair "up"—the style worn by the prudent, virtuous woman—rather than the immodest, free-flowing hair common among prostitutes who were advertising their charms. This free-flowing style had increasingly come to be adopted by the "new," independent woman in the Mediterranean world—an ancient version of the "women's liberation movement." Unfortunately, this contentious and immodest spirit was creeping into the church.[15]

"Head"—leader or source? As for this disrespectful behavior at Corinth, Paul was prompted to remind women to respect men. Why? Because men and women need each other. Paul says that woman was formed from man (Gen 2:21-23) and was made to be a "helper" (*'ēzer*) for him. This term

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"helper," as we've seen, is not one of lower status, since this term is used of *God* himself. Likewise, the man should show respect to the woman since man is not separate from woman (1 Cor 11:11); indeed, every man comes through woman (1 Cor 11:12). First Corinthians refers to the mutuality and interdependence of man and woman.

What about references to "headship"? Although we usually think in terms of *authority,* the term actually emphasizes "source" or "origin." Christ himself is "head" or the originator of creation—the one "through whom are all things" (1 Cor 8:6 ESV). He is the head of the body, holding together its various functions (Col 2:19). And when Paul says that "the head of Christ is God" (1 Cor 11:3 NIV), he means that Jesus originated from—was sent from—God (Jn 8:42; 16:27-28; 17:8).

This use of "head" could be compared to our use of, say, the "head" of the Nile River being Lake Victoria; the lake is the *originating point* of the river. This "origination" idea is supported by 1 Corinthians 11:12. Paul is basically saying this: "As the woman originates from the man, so also the man has his birth or origination through the woman; and all things originate from God." Paul isn't speaking of a male-over-female hierarchy in the home—or even in worship, as both male and female can freely pray and prophesy. Rather, he is saying that in Christ and the new creation, we have a *restoration of equality and mutual interdependence between men and women.*[16]

In my own previous thinking, I had assumed that "head" (*kephalē*) meant "leader, boss, authority." On closer inspection, I found that Paul uses "head" to mean "source," and he does so in conjunction with "savior/preserver" (*sotēr*) in the key passage of Ephesians 5:23. The Liddell-Scott-Jones lexicon of native Greek usage lists forty-seven metaphorical translations of "head"; interestingly, none of them means "leader" or "authority." What's more, the translators of the Greek Old Testament (the Septuagint) typically avoided rendering the Hebrew word *rō'š* ("leader") as *kephalē* in order to indicate "leader"; they apparently did not think translating it that way was suitable. In addition, many church fathers affirmed the meaning of *kephalē* as "source" rather than "authority"; these fathers include Cyril of Alexandria, Basil, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Athanasius, Eusebius and Ambrosiaster.[17]

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Submission. Ephesians 5:21 gives a revolutionary exhortation to believers to "submit to one another" (NIV). What is "submission"? Submission has the idea of *voluntarily yielding in love.* We see the mutuality of submission elsewhere in Ephesians—the idea of bearing with one another in love (Eph 4:2), of being kind, tenderhearted and forgiving toward one another (Eph 4:32). Prophets *submit* or *lovingly yield* themselves to one another, but they do this without being subordinates (1 Cor 14:32). When the church functions properly, its members place themselves under other brothers or sisters in Christ. Indeed, Christ voluntarily yields to the church in love by serving her (Mt 20:25-28; Lk 22:25-27; cf. Jn 13:1-17). Christ "submits" to unjust treatment (1 Pet 2:18–3:1). Likewise, wives yield to husbands with respect and husbands yield to wives in sacrificial, loving service—again, note the repeated husband-wife mutuality throughout 1 Corinthians 7.

But, isn't Christ the "head" of the church (Eph 5:23)? And shouldn't the church submit to Christ's authority? Yes, of course. Christ is the sovereign Lord, to whom every knee must bow. I noted above that "head" is better rendered "source" rather than "authority" for several reasons. And the very phrase "Savior of the body" reinforces this point: "head" and "Savior of the body" are roughly equivalent here. That is, the head-body relationship indicates that Christ is the source of nourishment, and the husband—the "head" of his wife—cares for his body by nourishing and caring for it, as he should his wife (Eph 5:29; Col 1:18-20; 2:19).

What of other "submitting" relationships—of slaves to masters and children to parents? Unlike the more egalitarian West, Roman husbands/fathers had *near-absolute authority* over their (typically less-educated) wives, over their children (even into adulthood) and over their slaves. So when Paul talks about submission for all of them, is Paul endorsing this near-absolute authoritative patriarchal structure? No, he is not. If Paul intended that *adult* children remain under the authority of their Roman fathers, this would go against Genesis 2:24, where a man *leaves* father and mother to cleave to his wife and become one flesh. Indeed, if we apply Paul's household rules to our modern era, we cannot properly speak of children having a "fixed role" throughout their lives. A child's role *changes*

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with age: as parents become old, children take on a more parent-like role; as children grow up and have their own children, they (and not the grandparents) takes the major responsibility for directing their own children.

Likewise, Paul doesn't endorse Roman slavery (Eph 6:1), but he still gives instructions for those trapped in it; in fact, in 1 Corinthians 7 he urges slaves to get free if they can. And one would most likely not obtain freedom if he were insubordinate. Paul doesn't *endorse* patriarchy, but neither does he *disregard* it. He focuses on the mutuality of life in Christ.

Ephesians 5 emphasizes a certain mutuality between husband and wife rather than a one-way relationship. So, the wife submits to her husband by respecting him, while the husband acts as a slave in loving and serving his wife—just as Christ took the role of a footwashing slave to serve his disciples and the church.

What of 1 Peter 3? Sarah does still "obey" Abraham and call him "lord" or "sir" (1 Pet 3:6). First, keep in mind that the husband is to "honor" his wife, who is a "fellow heir of the grace of life" (1 Pet 3:7). Second, these believing wives have courageously defied the Roman way and have not given way to fear (1 Pet 3:6)—that is, they have broken with the worship practices of their pagan husbands to follow Christ. Third, Peter writes against the backdrop of Roman husbands as having absolute authority in the home, and he does not want the Christian faith to be understood by unbelieving husbands as a tool of social rebellion. Clearly, the unbelieving husbands are not "spiritual heads" of their Christian wives; in fact, believing wives had defied the culture by refusing to adopt the deities or worship practices of their unbelieving spouses. It seems that many couples in the West—Christian or not—are operating at a fairly egalitarian level already; they would find the language of "obeying" or calling the husband "sir" or "lord" quite foreign, implicitly rejecting the patriarchal demands of ancient Roman—and, in the case of Sarah, ancient Near Eastern—culture. I am not here implying that cultural norms trump Scripture's authority; I am simply noting that complementarian evangelicals in the West do not themselves follow the "Sarah model" of obedience.

"I do not permit a woman to teach." Paul uses the same argument both in 1 Corinthians (where women dishonored their husbands by letting their

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hair down) and 1 Timothy (where women assumed authority they did not rightfully have to teach men). In 1 Corinthians 14:34 Paul says: "The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves." And in 1 Timothy 2:12 he says: "But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet."

Taking a step back, we get some context from Paul in Acts 20:17-35 where he warned that false teachers would rise up from within the church at Ephesus—where Timothy would eventually serve—and Timothy did come to face this very problem himself (1 Tim 1:3). These false teachers had quite an influence on women, especially younger widows, whose houses these false teachers would enter;[18] they would "captivate weak women . . . led on by various impulses" (2 Tim 3:6-7). Moreover, these widows not only were idle but would go from house to house—or from house church to house church (?)—as "[purveyors] of foolishness and busybodies, talking about things not proper to mention" (1 Tim 5:13). It seems that Paul is speaking to a unique situation that requires drastic action. Note the parallels between 1 Timothy 2:8-15 and 1 Timothy 5:3-16 and how the concerns in each passage are nearly identical (see table 20.1).

It is no coincidence the false teaching is called "old wives tales" (1 Tim 4:7). So we have a unique situation that 1 Timothy addresses—one that calls for dramatic action. Notice that Paul isn't appealing to creation to justify a male-over-female role hierarchy. If this were so, this might make it seem that women are more easily deceived than men. Instead, Paul is using this as an illustration, a parallel case, of what was happening in Ephesus: just as Eve was deceived by Satan in the garden (Gen 2:14), so Christian women in Ephesus are being deceived by demonically inspired false teachers who promoted asceticism; they disparage the body, and they deny the appropriate place of marriage and a woman's caring for children in the home (1 Tim 4:1-4; 5:3-16; cf. 2 Tim 3:6-7). However, this kind of vocation is appropriate and honorable for women, although Paul does not say this exhausts the vocation of a woman—only that it is legitimate and honorable and affirming of their womanhood.

When Paul says, "I do not permit [*ouk epitrepō*] a woman to teach or

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have authority [*authentein*] over a man," he uses two terms that are commonly misunderstood. First, "I do not permit" is not used in the New Testament or Greek Old Testament to refer to a perpetual or ongoing prohibition; Paul is not saying, "I will not/never permit." Rather, the sense is "I am not in the presently ongoing situation permitting"—namely, this is a unique, ad hoc exhortation to address serious problems in Ephesus, many of which concern women (twenty-one verses in 1 Timothy specifically relate to women—a very high proportion).[19] Second, the verb *authentein* means "to assume a stance of independent authority"[20] or "to dominate." The sense of the instruction is this: "I do not permit a woman to teach a man in a dominating way but to have a quiet demeanor."[21]

Table 20.1. Parallels Between 1 Timothy 2:8-15 and 1 Timothy 5:3-16

1 Timothy 2:8-15	1 Timothy 5:6, 11-15
2:9-10: Concern about dress and adornment, which goes hand in hand with 1 Tim 2:11-12 (the problem of disrespecting husbands and the need for proper demeanor). Whether insubordination or dressing seductively, these women are "playing loose" with societal norms.[a]	**5:11-15:** This woman of concern "gives herself to wanton pleasure" (5:6) and desires to marry (outside the faith) (5:11-12).
2:10: "good works, as is proper for women making a claim to godliness."	**5:10:** "devoted herself to every good work." **5:13:** "[younger widows] also learn to be idle, as they go around from house to house [house church to house church?]; and not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, talking about things not proper to mention." (See 2 Tim 3:6: false teachers "enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses.")
2:14: "the woman being deceived [by Satan], fell into transgression."	**15:** "some [women] have already turned aside to follow Satan" (cf. 1 Tim 4:1-3: "deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons," including forbidding marriage).
2:15: "But women will be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint."	**14:** "Therefore, I want younger widows to get married, bear children, keep house, and give the enemy no occasion for reproach."

[a]Gordon D. Fee, "The Great Watershed—Intentionality and Particularity/Eternality: 1 Timothy 2:8-15 as a Test Case," in *Gospel and Spirit* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), p. 58.

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I could go on and address other passages.[22] While some readers may not be persuaded by this brief discussion (although I would encourage exploration of the sources I have used), I hope this section at least indicates that the complementarian-egalitarian issue is more complex than it may appear at first and that that the debate is not one over biblical authority but of attempts at fair-minded, God-honoring interpretation.[23]

Responsibilities of the Parents

Reproduction. The blessing "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen 1:28; 9:1, 7) seems to win the approval of the psalmist (Ps 127:3, 5; 128:3) and Paul the apostle (1 Tim 2:15; 5:14). This is certainly God's ordinary plan, but is it sinful to avoid pregnancy?

Birth control. Some claim that the earth cannot bear an ever-expanding population. However, the most densely populated areas are in prosperous countries such as the Netherlands, Belgium and Japan. In fact, although the earth's population is at nearly seven billion at the time of writing, let's say that the earth reaches a population of nine billion people. In that case, we could fit the entire world into the state of Texas (262,134 square miles of land area) with each person (man, woman and child) having 850 square feet for himself or herself—*and the rest of the earth would be empty.*[24] At any rate, we find nothing in Scripture either in direct command or in principle that prohibits the use of contraceptives. Onan's sin in Genesis 38:8-10 was not an attempt at "birth control," but it was a selfish act—a refusal to raise up a line for a deceased brother (cf. Deut 25:5-6).

The Roman Catholic Church continues to take a very strong stand against any form of birth control by artificial means (as distinct from abstinence and the "rhythm" method). According to the 1930 papal encyclical *Casti Conubii,* artificial contraception is criminal and intrinsically immoral—a view reaffirmed by subsequent popes. (Many Protestants until World War II held similar positions.) The rationale? That marriage is a means to an end—namely, the generation and raising of children.

As we read Scripture and reflect on this topic, we ourselves do not view "artificial" birth control as being morally problematic. And what is

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"natural"? Even faithful Catholics using the "natural" rhythm method—with tapes, thermometers and tubes—testify that that this is anything but "natural."[25] But this is not to endorse all alleged "birth control." Some pills (e.g., RU 486) are abortifacients and thus morally wrong (we will explore this in chapter twenty-two), while others can be a health risk to the woman. And using birth control to practice "safe sex" in immoral relationships illustrates the tragic division between marriage and sex. True "safe sex" comes when we *save sex* for the loving, secure boundaries of faithful monogamous marriage.

Those who oppose contraception by appealing to "natural law" tend to isolate an *episode* of sexual intercourse. But this ignores the larger *saga* or *narrative* of the marriage itself. The integrity of an entire lifetime of a marriage may call for making judgments about when to have children, with the help of the Lord (Gen 4:1). It would seem that "spacing" children at times can be wise—during family transitions such as moving or perhaps completing one's schooling to be better equipped to care for the little ones God has entrusted to a couple.

Traditionally, when a couple was ready to marry, they were also ready for children. But today we see a different picture. Indeed, birth control in marriage can have an immature, even sinister, side: it does not welcome children as a gift, but instead insulates a couple from children—perhaps for self-centered pursuits of affluence, travel and avoiding an inconvenient lifestyle. The burden of proof would be on those refraining from having children: church planting in a dangerous setting or serious health concerns for the mother would qualify. Some may refrain out of fear: "I don't want to bring a child into this scary world"—a mantra that has been repeated throughout the ages—or "What if my kids don't turn out right?" or "What about college tuition bills?" This mindset is ultimately a failure of hope—a refusal to trust in a faithful, sovereign God. As we noted, parents need children more than children need parents; children in very significant ways "raise" parents. As one ethicist writes, "In childbearing we forfeit many choices—and find joy!"[26]

What of *sterilization*—permanent birth control? Sterilization is the same kind of ethical issue as contraception, and similar guidelines should be followed. In the nature of the case, since none of us is infallible in

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knowing the will of God or even in knowing our own future circumstances or disposition, a decision to be sterilized should be taken with great care.

Adoption. Adoption is a wonderful solution for the husband and wife who believe they are called of God to such a ministry, whether they have their own birth children or not. Just as there is no biblical ground for hesitancy in this, there is no mandate to adopt. But just think of the impact the church can have by opening its doors to foster care and adoption, often to children who have been rejected or neglected. Yes, there can be risks and challenges, but, again, much joy as well. As a family, we (the Copans) can all attest to the rich blessing of foster care as well as adoption. Scripture commands us to care for the fatherless. As the touching movie *I Am Sam* reminds us, we in the Christian community can band together to be the supportive spiritual family for the fatherless—or needy families in general.

Sex selection and embryo testing. While the Bible does not address sex selection of children, it is evil. This is can be carried out through identifying the sex of the unborn and aborting the unwanted or committing infanticide after birth. We are seeing "gendercide" take place on a horrific scale in places like China or India, where having sons is more financially attractive to couples: the son is expected to look after the parents in their old age; to marry a daughter requires a dowry to the groom's family; and so on. But now in these places—where males dramatically outnumber females—vast numbers of men cannot marry.

What about in utero screening for other reasons? Thousands of expectant mothers in the United States undergo embryo testing—often with tragic outcomes. Ninety percent of unborn children diagnosed with Down syndrome are aborted. So are others with cystic fibrosis and similar genetic abnormalities.[27] While it is important for parents to prepare well for the future birth of their child, such a destructive narcissism runs utterly contrary to the calling of parents to welcome and care for their children—just as God has lovingly embraced helpless, fallen sinners and welcomed them into his family (cf. Ezek 16:1-6; Rom 5:6).

Loving. Parents are to love the children they beget (Eph 6:4; Col 3:21; Tit 2:4)—an example of the heavenly Father's sacrificial love (Eph 3:14-15). Typically, children who are loved will have a greater grasp of God's love for

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them. This love for children must be spoken and reinforced through demonstration (1 Jn 3:18).

The ultimate unloving act is divorce—a terrifying, destructive force in a child's life because, no matter what the explanation, the child knows that at least one—and maybe both—parent does not love her enough to make the home "work." Indeed, the best gift parents can give children is to love one another well. When this is visibly expressed and strongly felt, an atmosphere of security is created, and the parents become role models for all of life's relationships.

Modeling. Every Christian is expected to be full of good works and to model Christlike living (Mt 5:16; Eph 5:1-2). In a special way, parents are responsible to live authentic Christian lives before their children (Prov 23:26), as they provide the strongest human influence in a child's life. Modeling includes humbling ourselves and asking forgiveness of our children. It also includes not only exhorting our children to be a blessing to others, but to make sure that as parents we ourselves are a blessing as well.

Providing. Parents are responsible for their dependent children. They are to provide materially, physically, socially, spiritually and mentally (education). In this way children will grow in wisdom and stature, in favor with God and fellow human beings (Lk 2:52). Providing for the family in our society takes money, and earning money typically takes time away from home. Yet the care for children requires time spent with them. How can this double demand on parental time be reconciled?

Whenever possible, children in their earliest years up to the start of school, should have a full-time parent at home. (In light of our complementarian-egalitarian discussion above, some may prefer "mother" and others "parent" in the present section.) As we noted earlier, while we greatly admire and respect those single moms (and dads) who try to work to financially support their families *and* to be loving parents as best they can, a woman can't capably be a full-time mother *and* have a full-time outside job without compromising the children's well-being. Raised by strangers in a daycare setting that parents can't oversee or observe, children will get the "leftovers" of the parents' day; the parents will be tired and not at their best and, out of guilt, will likely indulge them by substituting material gifts for time and by not firmly disciplining them. All things being equal, who can care for a

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child better than her own parent? And what better gift to give a child than time spent together?

This is not to say that a stay-at-home mother or father can't find creative ways to generate income from home or work part-time as, say, a physical therapist, counselor or consultant. Young children should have the stability of a parent at home at all times; this gives children structure, security and bonding with their parents so that they will not be limping along through life as adults. Children need to be welcomed as a high priority, but many of them do not feel valued and get shortchanged because both parents are pursuing careers and neglecting their little "loans from the Lord." Full-time parenting is an investment for the next generation's well-being. *If one is a part-time parent now, it's likely that one will be a part-time parent the rest of one's life.*

Increasingly, both parents need to work to maintain financial viability. In most societies of the past, mothers worked outside the home, just as the ideal mother of Proverbs 31. But until the Industrial Revolution (a terrible time for mothers and children), that work was in the field or forest, with the whole family participating so that the caring and nurturing continued unabated. How do we solve the dilemma?

The attitude of parents toward one another and toward the children as well as time spent together—not simply "quality time"—help create an atmosphere in which children can flourish. And children need *both* parents to enhance their development. As sociologist David Popenoe notes, "children have dual needs that must be met [by the complementarity of male and female parenting styles]: one for independence and the other for relatedness, one for challenge and the other for support."[28] If parents are absent, what is the motive? Why does the father work such long hours? Why does the mother seek outside employment? Is the father working hard to try to "prove his love" through tireless labor and lavish gifts when all the children ultimately want is *him?* Or he may simply be materialistic or just selfish in wanting to spend time elsewhere than with his family. These attitudes undermine the family's well-being.

Christian workers sometimes neglect family responsibility for a higher motive—advancing the kingdom of God. There are times when such a

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motive is legitimate, but other times it may be to escape the challenges and failures of home life. Brother Yun, the remarkable Chinese church leader who now lives in the West, points this out. After his own neglect of his family, he came to see that he needed to honor God by cherishing his family relationships.[29] If a man is celibate, like Paul, that is one thing, but if he is already married, part of his ministry call is already settled—his home. To neglect this is to risk everything since church ministry is reserved for those who succeed in the responsibilities of the home (1 Tim 3:2-5; Tit 1:6-9).

And why does the mother seek outside employment during the hours a child is at home—or ought to be? If economic survival is the question, the choice is right, but "economic survival" and a better standard of living are not synonymous. Perhaps work outside the home boosts a sense of self-worth; after all, promotions and pay raises are a "measurable success." Successes at work are often shorter range, tangible and more immediately gratifying—unlike successes at home that are more long range, often imperceptible and not noticed by outsiders. It is a very high calling to manage a home and train up young disciples in the Lord—to raise up a generation that can have a leavening, brightening effect in society and the world. The lie is that success in the marketplace proves one's value.

Instructing. The atheistic scientist Richard Dawkins has said that religious instruction for children is tantamount to "child abuse"; it leads to fear, guilt, inhibitions, low self-confidence and the like. The secularist parent is best positioned to guide children.[30] Now, it's one thing to make a claim; it's another to justify it. Despite Dawkins's alleged commitment to science, he is out of touch with the evidence. Sociologist Christian Smith spearheaded a large-scale study of American teenagers (3,290 of them), and they were categorized into the *devoted* and the *regulars* (who were predominantly Protestant and Catholic Christians) along with the *sporadic* and the *disengaged*. What impact did lack of religious upbringing or religious (Christian) involvement have on teenagers?

The more these teens moved in the *disengaged* direction, (a) the more they were involved in drugs, drinking, pornography and "action" video games; (b) the more poorly they did at school, cut classes, and ended up

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getting suspended or expelled; (c) the more bad-tempered and rebellious toward parents they were; and (d) the earlier they became sexually involved, including the number of partners and age of their first sexual encounter. By contrast, the more teens moved in the *devoted* direction, (a) the greater their sense of well-being and likelihood in planning for the future, sense of purpose, freedom from depression, satisfaction with personal appearance, not feeling alone or invisible or guilty; (b) the closer they were to their parents (and felt they had the right amount of freedom from them) and the better they got along with other adults; (c) the more they believed in objective morality and were less likely to lie to their parents or cheat at school; and (d) the more likely they were to care about the poor and elderly and homeless, be concerned about racial justice, and participate in volunteer work and leadership roles. In *every* category out of ninety-one variables, the more teens moved in the *devoted* direction, the healthier their lives were. Given this evidence, it appears that the *disengaged* parent, the secularist parent, would more likely be accused of child abuse![31]

No wonder Scripture places a premium on teaching one's children. And this is to be done in all kinds of settings: "when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates" (Deut 11:19-20 NIV; cf. Deut 6:6-9). Parents are to train up children in the way they should go (Prov 22:6). Both parents have an obligation before God to nurture children in the reading, discussing and application of Scripture as a daily part of family life; this should include praying and singing together. It includes modeling and instruction about relationships with others. The Christian family should be something of a church in miniature—training grounds for the church's community life and worship as well as serving together to meet the needs of others locally and around the world. This kind of on-the-ground discipleship training is non-negotiable—a cornerstone of family life.

Disciplining. Proverbs speaks straightforwardly about discipline: "He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him" (Prov 13:24 RSV). Not to discipline—and discipline beginning

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at an early age—is to wish for a child's destruction (Prov 19:18). Discipline can help drive foolishness from a child (Prov 22:15; 23:13-14) and keep him from shaming his family (Prov 29:15; 29:17). So discipline is for a child's own sake, but family honor is not unimportant (God does not want his name blasphemed among the Gentiles).

The "rod" is a symbol of discipline in Proverbs. It is a broad-ranging term—a branch, stick or some instrument fashioned from a branch. Corporal punishment was to be painful, but not severe ("he will not die," Prov 23:13); it should be carried out in a *loving* spirit (Prov 3:12), not with uncontrolled anger or as an attempt to humiliate the child. It should not exasperate or discourage (Col 3:21). Furthermore, corporal punishment is not the only means of discipline. As we see in Proverbs, discipline can range from warning and rebuke to corporal punishment. Some children may need little or no corporal discipline; a stern rebuke may suffice. Perhaps the form of discipline will vary from culture to culture, but the necessity of it is clear.

In reaction to child abuse many have gone to ridiculous extremes in the name of "child rights." For example, in 1979, Sweden's parliament prohibited "humiliating treatment" such as cutting TV rights and confining a child to her bedroom; children could even sue for "divorce" from incompatible parents. The Bible rejects such a mindset. First, discipline should be understood in advance; that is, it should be *predictable,* not capricious—a matter of cause and effect: "If you do X, then you can expect Y." It should also be *prompt* (not, "I'm going to count to ten, and if you don't come to me, I'll . . ."). Moreover, parents must be *consistent* rather than haphazard ("Oh, I'll just let it go this time. I'm too tired"). Discipline, further, includes *both* parents adhering to the same approach to parenting, not allowing a child to play off one parent against the other. Their approach should balance "love" and "justice"—as opposed to the extremes of permissiveness and harshness. Parents should be authorities without being authoritarian.

Homes must be *parent*-directed, not *child*-directed. Children must learn to adapt. It is amazing how a two-year-old tyrant can make his football player father cower and cater to his whims and desires. Especially relevant in a coarsened culture is the parents' obligation to train children in manners; they must insist on politeness, friendliness, helpfulness and re-

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spect for the property of others. Parents let their children off the hook when adults greet young ones who ignore gestures of friendliness ("he's tired" or "she's just being shy"). Not to insist on a friendly reply and a handshake from children will hamper them later in life. Indeed, children should be trained to be friendly, approachable and truly amiable; they can be thus trained, but it takes a consistent effort. As actress Emma Thompson once said in an interview, it is a form of "child abuse" not to teach children good manners; this is a failure to prepare them for life. Believing parents must be intentional rather than passive or reactive. They must train their children to be a blessing. And it cannot be emphasized enough that children should be taught courtesy and loyalty first and foremost in the home, which then overflows to relationships outside the home.

Courtesy and graciousness help minimize friction and open doors for relationship, not to mention being a witness for the gospel. And even in the midst of disagreement, parents should insist on courtesy. Tantrums, bad attitudes, muttering under one's breath, rolling the eyes, or slamming the door should be dealt with swiftly. Courtesy is a non-negotiable, and parents themselves should model this as they engage with each other and with their children. On the other hand, parents should avoid the creation of too many rules. Constant confrontation on nonmoral, non-relational issues can cause discouragement or stir up a rebellious spirit.

In the midst of discipline, parents must have a loving, open relationship with their children. Children should know that discipline springs from love. Parents may need to ask their children's forgiveness for being overly harsh or critical. In Eastern cultures, parents may insist on honor and respect, but when parental *love* and *relationship* are absent, the respect will not be heartfelt, only external.

"Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Prov 22:6 RSV). Note that this is a proverb, not a promise or guarantee. While environment is important, Scripture rejects environmental determinism (Ezek 18:1-17). Children grow up and make their life choices, but even rebels can return home (Lk 15:11-32). And in the end, we can be encouraged that God's providence is greater than parental failures, and we must remember that God loves our children even more than we do.[32]

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Responsibility of the Child

"Honor your father and your mother" (Ex 20:12) is the comprehensive statement of the child's responsibility. Our parents have given us life, and even if they prove unworthy in other areas, we can be grateful to them for the gift of life.

Loving. "My son, give me your heart" (Prov 23:26 RSV) is the cry of every parent worthy of the name. But there are some parents who shamefully abuse their children. Those children can hardly respect their parents or follow them. But they can choose to act in a loving way—and this may include confronting them about such wrongs. We may not feel warm toward them, but we can pray for them and choose to do what is in their best spiritual interest. Perhaps a way to honor abusive or alcoholic parents is to keep silent rather than speak negatively about them before others. On the other hand, ignoring or covering up the problem only enables them to carry on their harmful behavior without consequence.

Obeying. Children are to obey their parents (Eph 6:1; Col 3:20). Are there circumstances in which this law does not apply? The command is conditioned on being "in the Lord." Though this is not clarified, this would include a young child's refusal to disobey a parent's command if it required wrongdoing. However, if the child is strong-armed to comply, (the greater) guilt would rest on the parent. For older children, Ezekiel 18 clearly enunciates that there is personal responsibility on the part of each person before God. And parents are wise to direct their children to intentionally place themselves under God's authority as early as possible, reminding them that they are ultimately accountable to him.

Another principle has to do with the question of when a man is to leave his father and mother (Gen 2:24). This is more *emotionally* leaving rather than *physically* leaving—although they are not altogether separate. Parental honor should continue throughout life, but scriptural priority is given to one's *own* marriage over that of one's *parents.* Much grief and marriage failure come from the sinful interference of in-laws and the sinful acceptance of that interference on the part of the married son or daughter. Loyalties must shift, even though honor continues, albeit in new manifestations. Even if one is not married, it seems that the "leaving" at marriage

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serves as a helpful parallel: children should obey their parents so long as they are dependent on them for their livelihood. This does not mean they cannot persuade their parents while living under their roof, nor does it mean they reject their counsel and experienced judgment when they are independent. Indeed, they are wise to embrace their parents' seasoned counsel throughout life's journey!

However, in the final analysis grown children must make their own choices, particularly in life—determining decisions in light of kingdom priorities; doing so may create division (a "sword") within families. We ourselves have seen this with believers with a Muslim or Hindu background who have embraced Christ and consequently were rejected by their own flesh and blood. Indeed, this may appear as though one "hates" one's family (Mt 10:34-37; Lk 12:51-53; 14:26-27). To fulfill God's will, it may be necessary to violate the will of the very one we would most desire on earth to please. Christians do not make such choices lightly, nor will they ever use them as an excuse to cover their own stubborn self-will (Mk 7:11).

Caring for parents in old age. The Lord arranged a beautiful solidarity of generations: the parents have the privilege of caring for their children for the first decades of life, and the children may have the privilege of caring for their parents for the last decades. Sometimes there is a child who is dependent for a lifetime, and sometimes a parent becomes dependent for what seems a lifetime; but the average responsibility of child for a parent is less than a decade in contemporary America. No child should feel any sense of guilt for putting a parent in an institution if that is truly the only place the parent can be cared for adequately. But the multitudes of children who put away their parents for selfish reasons—often neglecting even to keep in touch—violate the fifth commandment in a despicable way. "If any one does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his own family, he has disowned the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Tim 5:8 RSV).

Should not parents fully provide for their own old age and possible infirmity? Paul teaches that parents should lay things in store for their children so as not to burden them (2 Cor 12:14). But parents who cannot provide for their old age, or parents who have not done so, offer a won-

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derful opportunity for their children to demonstrate their love and loyalty and gratitude for life itself and for all the sacrifice those parents have invested in them.

To resolve something of a tension here, parent should provide for their children as fully as they are able until their children are independent, so they can, above all, invest in God's kingdom. To provide more for them often has the very opposite effect of that intended: continued dependence on the efforts of others, lack of initiative, ingratitude, greedy sibling conflict and a host of other evils spawned by one's love of money (1 Tim 6:10). That said, parents should not hesitate to provide prudently for their own old age as best they can.

One biblically authentic approach for parents, then, would be full provision for their children to reach independence, prudent provision for their own retirement if they are able and free of conscience to do so, and joyful trust in the Lord and in their children for any further provision that may become necessary.

Such are the responsibilities of children for their parents: to honor, love, obey and provide for them.

We have devoted more attention to the topic of sex, marriage and the home for several reasons. In the first place, we have combined the consideration of two of the Ten Commandments (the fifth and seventh). Furthermore, this topic is emphasized more than any other ethical issue in Scripture. Finally, this is the area of life that seems to be most under assault by the powers of evil. We seem most vulnerable here, and we, in dependence on God's Spirit, must think clearly and Christianly about such matters and to dedicate ourselves to living out the gospel in our homes, whether as married or unmarried Christians. If we do so, we will, by God's grace, set back the powers of darkness and advance the kingdom of God as yeast permeates a batch of dough (Mt 13:33).

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PART VIII

LIFE ISSUES

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21

Murder, Killing and Racism

You shall not murder.

Murder is considered the worst of all crimes more universally than any other, and at the same time is the sin most universally practiced. How so? Christ does not let us get away with restricting the law to those who slit throats or blow off heads, but includes hostile anger as well (Mt 5:21-22). Violations of the sixth commandment cover a wide spectrum.

Forms of Killing

By including anger and verbal abuse in the category of murder, Jesus did not say or mean that they were *as evil as* murder. But they are the same variety of sin and may not be excused as mere human weakness. In fact, all sin, including murder, is rather like an onion. Beneath the final act are lesser acts, and beneath all the acts is a corrupt heart. Murder is highly visible, the full-grown sin, but when the outer layer is peeled away, various levels of violence are seen as part of the same "onion," and beneath the physical and verbal abuse is the heart of anger, hatred, or failing to love. If the core of inadequate love is planted and allowed to grow, the hateful activity will follow. And all of it falls under the judgment of God.

Murder. Some vegetarians have held that when God inscribed "You shall not kill" (Ex 20:13 RSV) in stone at Sinai, he forbade the taking of any life for any cause. Some pacifists have held that he prohibited the taking of any human life for any cause. But the commandment cannot be taken that way, for Moses, who received the law, commanded the taking of animal life

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for sacrifices and food and the taking of human life in war and through capital punishment. In the context of Old Testament law, the command meant to deliberately or intentionally take innocent human life—killing without divine warrant or authority. The questions of war and capital punishment are so important and complex that we shall consider them later in greater detail. But there is one other biblical exception to the law against taking human life: killing in self-defense.

Self-defense. Physical resistance in self-defense seems to be validated in Scripture (Ex 21:13; 22:2; Num 35:22-29) but not commanded. In the (utterly unique) instance of Christ, he did not flinch in the face of death but gave himself to evil people to provide for their salvation. On the other hand, the Roman citizen Paul, when his life was under threat, appealed to the Roman army for protection (Acts 23:12-33) and in another instance made an escape (Acts 9:23-25).

Not all actions called self-defense are legitimate, and there is a hierarchy among those that are. Defense of others or even of oneself is certainly of higher priority than the defense of material possessions. But when there is danger of physical harm, a key question is whether or not life is in jeopardy. That is the clearest validation of self-defense.

Another basic question for the Christian is whether the impending harm is crime-oriented or whether it is persecution for Christ's sake. One might choose nonresistance when suffering for Christ but choose to resist in a crime-oriented aggression for the sake of others or even for the sake of the aggressor himself. If the choice is made to resist physical violence, the Christian should ask whether or not physical resistance is the only action available or whether there are other options such as talk or deception (see chapter twenty-eight, "Truth and Deception"). If there seems to be no other option but to resist with physical force, the Christian should discern whether killing is the only alternative or whether lesser violence would adequately restrain evil.

Though there are exceptions in which God authorizes the taking of human life, the sin of murder is the ultimate sin against a human being (Lev 24:17; Num 35:16-21). While human life is not the supreme value, it is certainly a critical one for the continued pursuit of other values! And the value of life is probably the watershed issue for any society.

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Physical violence. In a decaying society, murder may still be abhorred, but violence short of murder often becomes acceptable. Studies have repeatedly shown that violence in the entertainment media such as movies and disturbingly graphic video games fosters such acceptance. But the ugly end result is a sick society where spousal abuse and child abuse are said to touch one of four people.

Violence in the home has been the underreported and largely ignored crime of a society preoccupied with appearances. It is estimated that 32 million people in America are affected by domestic violence, with up to one-third of the cases going unreported.

Verbal abuse. Christ's commentary on the sixth commandment (Mt 5:22) emphasized *verbal* abuse ("you good-for-nothing!" "you idiot!" or "you fool!"). James (Jas 1:26; 3:1-12) and Solomon (Prov 13:3; 15:1, 4, 23; 17:28; 18:8, 13; 21:23; 29:20) had a great deal to say about sins of the tongue, but the rest of Scripture is strong on the subject as well.

But didn't Jesus call certain religious leaders "fools" (Mt 23:17)? Was he contradicting himself? The difference is between *contempt* and *hate* in Matthew 5 and *righteous rebuke* in Matthew 23. James 3 says that the tongue is like wildfire and poison, damaging relationships and wreaking havoc in the lives of others.

A direct attack on a person with carping criticism or biting depreciation, sarcastic humor or subtle insinuation can destroy something in that person. But just as deadly is the criticism spoken about a person to others. Any word that harms another is murder-in-spirit. Any rebuke must be spoken in love for the other person's well-being or edification (Eph 4:29)—not simply to vent one's emotions. Speaking the truth in love will have a constructive purpose (Eph 4:15). Confronting someone in the wrong must be done discreetly and in a spirit of humility and grace, directed only to the believer in the wrong (Mt 18:15-18; Gal 6:1). Instead of engaging in a spirit of gossip, the absent person must be just as "safe" with the Spirit-directed child of God as when he is present with him.

Neglect. Another way to harm is by doing and saying nothing when a word or an action would keep someone from harm. Failure to put a balustrade or parapet around a flat rooftop brought bloodguiltiness if someone fell from the

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roof (Deut 22:8). Failure to do good, when in one's power to do so, is sin (Prov 3:27-28). So the poor, the helpless and the starving are my responsibility to the extent that I have the ability to help. To be silent when another is falsely accused, whether in a court of law or in the presence of private gossip, is to participate in the harm. Neglect, then, is another form of murder (see also Ex 21:29-31).

Hateful anger. Incredibly, Christ's commentary on the sixth commandment includes a person's inner state. Contemptuous anger is subject to God's judgment (Mt 5:22). This was not original with Jesus. Moses had already recorded God's will, "You shall not hate your brother in your heart . . . or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 19:17-18 RSV). Lack of love, as well as positive hatred, is a form of murder. Of course, Jesus' main point is to highlight the kingdom value of reconciliation; this is evident in concrete commands that follow: "*Leave* your offering there before the altar and *go;* first *be reconciled* to your brother, and then *come* and *present* your offering. *Make friends* quickly with your opponent" (Mt 5:24-25).

In their book *Kingdom Ethics,* Glen Stassen and David Gushee point out the Sermon on the Mount's fourteen "triads" highlighting important "transforming initiatives" for Christ's disciples. In these triads, Jesus (a) informs disciples of the *traditional piety of the day* ("You have heard it said"); (b) points out *common dead-end behavior-patterns or "vicious cycles"* such as lust, anger or making phony vows; (c) commands disciples to *take concrete steps of obedience*—to take specific action against sexual temptation; to take concrete steps toward reconciliation with enemies; or to speak truthfully and faithfully without resorting to additional measures to make one's word binding.[1] These initiatives break the destructive patterns of behavior and provide a concrete path to healing, wholeness, virtue and reconciled relationships.

How does this work with anger? First, this concrete action seeks to transform the *angry person* from being trapped in the vicious cycle of anger into actively seeking to be a peacemaker with his enemy. Second, it transforms not only the angry person, but also the *relationship*—a relationship once marked by hatred, anger and division is now transformed into one characterized by continued forgiveness and reconciliation. Finally, the goal is to transform the *enemy* into a friend.

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Although we address some of these transforming initiatives elsewhere in the book, we list all of them from the Sermon on the Mount in table 21.1.

Table 21.1. Transforming Initiatives in the Sermon on the Mount[a]

TRADITIONAL PIETY	VICIOUS CYCLE	TRANSFORMING INITIATIVE
1. You shall not kill (Mt 5:21-26)	Being angry, or saying, "You fool!"	*Go, be reconciled*
2. You shall not commit adultery (Mt 5:27-30)	Looking with lust is adultery in the heart	*Remove the cause of temptation* (cf. Mk 9:43-50)
3. Whoever divorces, give a certificate (Mt 5:31-32)	Divorcing involves you in adultery	(Implied: *Be reconciled:* cf. Mt 1:18-20; 1 Cor 7:11)
4. You shall not swear falsely (Mt 5:33-37)	Swearing by anything involves you in a false claim	*Let your yes be yes, and your no be no*
5. Eye for eye, tooth for tooth (Mt 5:38-42)	Retaliating violently or vengefully, resisting by evil means	*Turn the other cheek* (don't pay back insult for insult) *Give your tunic and cloak* *Go the second mile* *Give to beggar and borrower*
6. Love neighbor and hate enemy (Mt 5:43-48)	Hating enemies (and just loving your friends) is the same vicious cycle you see in the Gentiles and tax collectors	*Love enemies, pray for your persecutors; be all-inclusive as your Father in heaven is*
7. When you give alms (Mt 6:1-4)	Blowing a trumpet/giving for show like the hypocrites	but *give in secret,* and your Father will reward you
8. When you pray (Mt 6:5-6)	Making a show in prayer like the hypocrites	*But pray in secret,* and your Father will reward you
9. When you pray (Mt 6:7-8, 9-15)	Heaping up empty phrases like Gentiles	*Therefore pray like this:* "Our Father . . . "
10. When you fast (Mt 6:16-18)	Fasting for show like the hypocrites	*but dress with joy,* and your Father will reward you
11. Do not pile up treasures on earth (Mt 6:19-23)	Moth and rust destroy, and thieves enter and steal	*But pile up treasures in heaven*
12. No one can serve two masters (Mt 6:24-34)	Serving God and wealth, worrying about food and clothes	*But seek first God's reign and God's justice/righteousness*
13. Do not judge, lest you be judged (Mt 7:1-5)	Judging others means you'll be judged by the same measure	*First take the log out of your own eye*
14. Do not give holy things to dogs, nor pearls to pigs (Mt 7:6-12)	They will trample them and tear you to pieces	*Give your trust in prayer to your Father in Heaven*

[a]Adapted from Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), p. 142.

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Now, anger is not always wrong. If it were, God would be the chief sinner, for he is angry with wickedness every day (Ps 7:11). And note that David does not say God is angry merely at sin. He is angry with wicked *people*—even using the language of "hate" (Ps 5:5; 11:5), which we addressed in chapter two ("The Objects and Conflicts of Love"). Yes, God loves all humans without exception (Jn 3:16-17) and genuinely extends the offer of salvation and the call to repentance to them (Acts 17:30; 1 Tim 2:4; 2 Pet 3:9; 1 Jn 2:2, cf. 1 Jn 5:19). Yet we noted that God's holy wrath—simultaneous with his love (Jn 3:16-17)—remains on them, and God will treat as an enemy ("hate") those who continue to oppose his will (Jn 3:36).

Can sinful mortals be Godlike in their anger? Yes, but it is not easily done. Anger is to be put away (Eph 4:31; Col 3:8); it is one of the works of the flesh (Gal 5:19-20); it does not work the righteousness of God (Jas 1:20). But Jesus was angry (Mk 3:5), and we are commanded in our anger to refrain from sin and to release it (Ps 4:4; Eph 4:26). God himself is "slow to anger" (Ex 34:6), and the virtuous person is likewise to be "slow to anger" (Jas 1:19) rather than "never angry." Indeed, *never* getting angry would be a sign of *apathy*; not getting angry at injustice and cruelty is a vice, not a virtue. Scripture approves of being angry under some circumstances (Eph 4:26), but the major biblical emphasis is on anger as evil; exceptions seem very limited.

Anger at sin, even anger at the sinner, can be a good thing (2 Cor 7:11). Jeremiah was full of the fury of the Lord (Jer 6:11), and Paul was angry over the idolatry of the Athenians (Acts 17:16). Yet Christ himself refrained from anger when the offense was against him personally (1 Pet 2:23-24), and "like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth" (Is 53:7 RSV).

Righteous and unrighteous anger can be distinguished by the *cause* of anger. One should be angry over sin that offends God, harms others, or harms the person sinning. The difficulty with being righteously indignant is that our motives are often mixed. Am I distressed over a sin that offends God and harms people, or am I angry over the way I am affected? In the latter case, the safe thing may be to eschew anger altogether, as when my child does wrong but the wrong embarrasses me. Better to wait till the

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anger subsides to be sure the resulting action does not come from a mixture of righteous and unrighteous indignation. Anger is sinful when it is for the wrong reason or results in the wrong action.

To keep this emotion from igniting for the wrong reason or from burning out of control, Scripture offers two paths to control anger. First, *keep your wits about you:* don't get angry suddenly (Jas 1:19). Second, *don't let it keep burning:* don't let it last till the next day (Eph 4:26). Either a "low flashpoint" (a quick response without reflection) or a "slow burn" (allowing the emotion to continue and deepen) seem to risk causing even righteous indignation to go astray.

Against the clear teaching of Scripture that most (not all) human anger is wrong and that the proper response is to control it (Prov 16:32), many Christian psychologists hold that anger is morally neutral and must be expressed.[2] To this we respond that anger is neutral in the same way that hatred and killing are: Sometimes they are right, but mostly they are wrong. Anger in itself is a wrong emotion if directed against the wrong *object* (God, an innocent person, a thing), if for the wrong *cause* (personal offense, pride), or if it leads to wrong *behavior* (retaliation, vengeance, physical violence).

Moreover, "venting" one's anger is often like ventilating a fire that will do further damage. Anger should not be *suppressed* (repeatedly "stuffing" our emotions so that we are seething beneath the surface). Nor should it be *vented,* which displays lack of self-control and leads to further unrestrained outbursts. Rather, it should be constructively *expressed* to God (e.g., Ps 13:1-2; 62:8) and to others. We express our anger to others for *their* well-being, in order to restore or preserve the relationship. Anger can actually prompt us to confront a problematic state of affairs.

Race and Racism

Racism technically refers to the idea that certain nonracial characteristics, especially cultural patterns, are the result of race. An example would be to generalize from the behavior of some people of a given race, assigning that kind of behavior to all belonging to the same race. The result is often hatred, intolerance or unjust discrimination. This attitude is often expressed more freely and forcefully by the majority race in a given community; thus, the

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label "racist" or "ethnocentric" is often assigned to those who consider their own race superior and oppress others. But clearly, an oppressed minority can just as readily engage in racist attitudes and action; "reverse discrimination" and abdicating personal responsibility by hiding behind a certain "victim" status is racist. No people are immune to the virus of racism. Contrary to Martin Luther King Jr.'s call to judge people based on "the content of their character," many black leaders perpetuate what King fought *against*—namely, judging people by the color of their skin.[3] Of course, the same kind of sinful attitudes and behavior can be based on differences of culture, language, tribe, socially defined class or caste, as well as on race.

Corporate responsibility. Unjust and unloving behavior can become characteristic of a group and become corporate or even institutionalized injustice or oppression. A legal system or even a religion may create discrimination against a class of people. For example, we see discrimination against the Chinese in Malaysia; we see it against Dalits ("untouchables"—those without a caste) in India, who are ostracized by the caste-creating religion of Hinduism itself. In a former era, racism was exemplified in the apartheid of South Africa and the "separate but equal" Jim Crow laws in the US South. That said, in certain countries laws may officially oppose discrimination, but the society itself may engage in unjust, unmerciful, prejudicial practices.

A biblical view of race and discrimination. Class discrimination that works to the harm of some in a society is virtually a universal phenomenon. For Christians to think themselves superior is sin (Phil 2:1-8). To base such thoughts or feelings on class distinction is both sinful and foolish (Jas 2:1-9). After all, what do we have that we did not receive (1 Cor 4:7)? Racial discrimination is widespread but not so universal as class discrimination. The Old Testament exhorts national Israel to be distinctive among the surrounding "Gentile" nations, but it does not highlight the issue of "race"—a distinction much more prevalent in our day and one based on physical characteristics.

Rahab the Canaanite is portrayed as a true Israelite who acknowledges the one true God, whereas Achan, an ethnic Israelite, acts like a foreigner

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(Josh 2; 6–7). Uriah was a Hittite, but he is highlighted for his noble character and as one of David's mighty men (1 Chron 11:41). In the New Testament, Jesus praises the "mixed-breed" Samaritan for showing love to his "enemy" neighbor (Lk 10). In Colossians 3:11—an expansion of Galatians 3:28—Paul speaks not only of *race,* but of the entire *social-cultural-racial* sphere. Barbarians were those who could not speak Greek and didn't live according to Greco-Roman norms. Scythians, who lived in the Black Sea area, were considered the worst kind of barbarian. Paul, by saying that there is no difference in Christ, attempts to undermine every kind of cultural prejudice in the Christian community since we are part of the new humanity in the "new human"—Christ.[4]

Ironically, modern racism received its greatest impetus from scientists of the last century. The subtitle of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* was *The Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life*. Virtually all nineteenth-century evolutionists held to the theory of superior and inferior races. Even before this, the Scottish philosopher David Hume (d. 1776) claimed that miracles were believed by "ignorant and barbarous" peoples, by which Hume meant blacks.

Some have held that the Bible affirms both racial segregation and unjust discrimination (slavery, for example), but it does not do so.[5] God did require segregation and discrimination among people, but always based on *religious* or *moral* distinctions, never on race or class distinctives. If one did not know better, one could get the impression that the prophetic denunciations of the Israelites were anti-Semitic! Again, these were moral and theological in nature. Even the Canaanites were condemned not because of their race (which was virtually indistinct from the Israelites), but because of their wicked *practices.* And God promised Israel that the land would vomit out Israel as well if Israel acted like the Canaanites (Lev 18:28; 20:22). Though servitude was not forbidden in Scripture, God's attitude can clearly be seen in the restrictions set on an existing system of servitude (Deut 15:12-18; 23:15-16; cf. Deut 22:1-4). God's opposition to discrimination against the poor, the weak, the minority person, the oppressed is clear and strong. The alien was to be fully incorporated in the law of love and into the social community (Ex 23:9; Lev 19:33-34; Deut 10:18); treated equally

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before the law (Ex 12:49; Lev 24:22); included in the religious life (Ex 12:48-49; Is 56:3; Ezek 44:9); and would participate fully in God's plan for the future (Is 49:6; 52:14-15; Ezek 47:22-23; Zech 2:11). God's terrible judgment on Israel was in part because of their treatment of foreigners (Jer 7:5-7; 22:2-5; Ezek 22:7-15; Zech 7:10-14; Mal 3:1-5). God himself is a protector of the alien (Num 15:15-16).

When God so strongly opposes all injustice, including the injustice resulting from class and racial discrimination, why do Christians almost universally participate in their own cultural patterns of discrimination rather than joining with other believers to provide a radically biblical counterculture of justice, mercy and unity?

The roots of racism. *Pride* is a root cause of racism. And how foolish it is to base one's sense of superiority on physical characteristics, over which one has no responsibility (cf. Ex 4:11; 1 Cor 4:7)! Probably pride of race, however, is based more on *cultural* differences. We generalize from the very real, profound and wide-ranging differences in culture to assume that the highly visible physical differences are an indispensable part of the group's distinctives. Since people naturally prefer to associate with those whom they understand and with whom they agree, segregation in one form or another seems inevitable. Which natural affinity grouping may be legitimate and which is sinful thus becomes an abiding dilemma. It is the task of the Christian and the church to work at solving this dilemma with wisdom, compassion and courage.

Furthermore, *ignorance* extends this judgment to identify cultural patterns with skin color, and the observed behavior of some is generalized to characterize all in the group. So the faulty logic of pride and ignorance combine to divide and hurt.

In addition to pride and ignorant generalizing, *fear* contributes to racial and class strife—fear of the unknown, fear of "the other." Patterns of segregation increase the ignorance of what the other group is really like, and the prior decision to view whatever it *is* like as inferior to "our way" creates an atmosphere of fear in which imagination has more influence than reality. Another fear is that of being hurt by "the enemy," either through deliberate antagonism or through being deprived of some real or potential benefit

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because of that enemy. When one's person, possessions or position are put in jeopardy by someone else, fear, whether reasonable or not, begins to shape behavior. Fear can prompt a member of a powerless minority to be just as racist in attitudes and actions as those who have the power to impose injustice. Thus pride and fear often combine with ignorance to produce the full range of attitudes and actions of racism, from inadequate love, through hatred and violence, to structured injustice and killing.

African Americans. Some, such as the late Tom Skinner, a former leading black evangelical spokesman, say American racial problems are a white problem. There are at least two differing emphases among those who hold this view. Some hold that black and white are today reaping the whirlwind from the winds generated by America's slaveholding forefathers. White attitudes and black behavior patterns, both destructive to the black, were created during 250 years of American slavery.

Later studies discount this and point to present social structures and personal attitudes as the problem.[6] This view sees high potential in African Americans but a potential from which most African Americans are permanently barred by a tightly woven social fabric that begins with poverty and poor education leading to unemployment, low-paying jobs and crime. On this view, it is up to the white majority society to change the environment and social structures.

A contrasting perspective affirms that black people are primarily responsible for their own deliverance—and that even if all racial discrimination ceased, this would not by itself improve their economic status. Think about the majority Malay discrimination against the minority Chinese in Malaysia, even though the latter were more likely to succeed educationally and prosper economically. American black economist Walter Williams takes up this point, calling attention to the deafening silence from black leaders about black-on-black crime: 94 percent of blacks murdered are killed by *other* blacks, and while blacks comprise 13 percent of the population, they account for 50 percent of the nation's homicide victims. And when blacks commit crimes against Asians or whites, these commonly go unreported.[7]

Along with Williams and another black economist Thomas Sowell, black author Shelby Steele points out that racial victimization ("racial

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holding") is not the real problem, but a sense of entitlement from society—that society owes blacks something; society, rather than blacks themselves, is the agent of change. Rather than being colorblind and focused on merit and qualification, affirmative action or "quotas" that demand minority representation for, say, college admission means lowering academic standards for blacks. This in turn creates a sense of insecurity, as they will be second-guessing whether they were accepted because of their skin color or because they were truly qualified. And the second-guessing also includes observers of the process.[8]

Steele emphasizes that individual effort and sacrifice that characterized the early civil rights movement has been diminished. Rather than hesitating on the brink of opportunity, blacks as individuals must join the larger society to make a place for themselves. Race, he argues, must not be a source of advantage or disadvantage for anyone. Indeed, if all people are created equal, then racial difference cannot sanction power.[9]

This was essentially Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s position. He told a St. Louis congregation in 1961: "Do you know that Negroes are 10 percent of the population of St. Louis and are responsible for 58 percent of its crimes? We've got to face that. And we've got to do something about our moral standards." He added: "We know that there are many things wrong in the white world, but there are many things wrong in the black world, too. We can't keep on blaming the white man. There are things we must do for ourselves."[10]

These grave problems among African Americans—and we could add other ethnic groups—will not be fully solved by human wisdom and mere political actions. This is due not only to their vast complexity, but more so to the root problem of entrenched sin. The gospel message of reconciliation and "neither Jew nor Greek" in Christ has not been faithfully proclaimed by the church. We turn next to consider that failure.

Racism in the church. While political action is necessary, only a more pervasive cure of the human spirit can bring about a lasting solution—both within and outside the church. How can the church cleanse and heal its own members and then become God's instrument to cleanse and heal society?

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The new birth. New people alone can build a new society, but church membership does not bring this about automatically. Many churches in South Africa supported apartheid. How does one get Christians to behave like Christians?

Teaching. The church has the responsibility to teach the truth that we are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:26-28; Eph 2:11-14; 4:3-4; Col 3:10-11). But since attitudes are so often unconsciously embedded, the church must intentionally and courageously apply this truth, pointing out the insidious outcroppings of racial prejudice and God's hatred of this sin against the unity of his body.

Personal relations. Teaching must be activated in the personal relationship of blacks and whites on the job, in the community, in the home and in the church. The loving fellowship intended by the Father among transformed members of his family must be lived out. "Teaching" includes spiritual supervision, of course, so that members of the church are disciplined in living what is taught. Black and white disciples of Christ can build godly personal relationships and help awaken a culture-bound church. A roused church can, in turn, influence its community to build a more just and merciful society.

Structure and program. The church must not only teach and help individuals find the right way; it must eliminate every direct or indirect church policy of racial discrimination. This could begin by pastoral prayer and fellowship networks that include church leaders of different races. Black and white churches could hold special services to worship and pray together. And while churches understandably have their own worship styles, doctrinal distinctives, unique ministries and particular callings, does Scripture require every African American church, for example, to aggressively recruit whites until there is a racial balance equivalent to society at large? We believe this goes beyond any biblical mandate. On the other hand, though churches and other groups tend to develop along lines of cultural compatibility, this does not give license for any church to put formal or informal impediments to full participation by anyone, regardless of race, social status, or any other nonmoral characteristic. We must, however, work aggressively for unity in the body of Christ and labor to-

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gether for the advance of Christ's kingdom in which there is no barrier between white and black, high class and low class, male and female, rich and poor.

Another evidence of racism in the church has been the paternalistic, if not colonialistic, attitudes and relationships of many missionaries in the past. This has been replaced, in some instances, by a new racism, a nationalism that has given birth to anti-white attitudes among some church leaders in non-Western nations. Either type of racism is unworthy of those who call themselves Christian.

The principles enunciated for racism in the American church apply just as much to the far more common worldwide problem of classism or unchristian discrimination on the basis of a person's social status. I (Paul) have heard of people commenting, "Great Britain (or America) has its own caste system" or "Racism in much of the West is just as bad as the caste system in India." Not so. Tribal warfare across the continent of Africa, for example, and India's caste system, which holds hundreds of millions of Indians in abject poverty and bondage, make the evil of racism in North America pale by comparison. Yet we are responsible, not for the sins of others, but for our own. And measured by the pain inflicted, racism in the United States is a grievous personal and social ill.

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22

Abortion and Infanticide

The unwanted infant and the unwanted unborn have been killed from time immemorial, both when the killing was legal and when it was illegal. Until recently the church never seriously debated the morality of killing an infant for any reason. The *Didache,* an early Christian document (c. A.D. 100–110) affirms: "You shall not kill the fetus by abortion or destroy the infant already born." Even in 1963, a Planned Parenthood pamphlet stated, "An abortion kills the life of a baby after it has begun. It is dangerous to your life and health. It may make you sterile so that when you want a child you cannot have it."

But because of the recent introduction into the abortion controversy of new concepts about "personhood" and "quality of life," the debate has begun to encompass the newborn as well. One notable spokesman for infanticide is Princeton's Peter Singer. As we saw, he claims that because newborns (or those suffering from dementia) are not self-aware or aware of their existence over time, they ("human non-persons") have less value to society than pigs, dogs or chimps ("non-human persons").[1] This is no mere academic theory—regardless of whether a child is handicapped or not. For example, the Philadelphia abortionist Kermit Gosnell was sentenced to life in prison in 2013 for killing newborn children—severing their spinal cord—after botched abortions. And the media silence, with only a few exceptions, was deafening. This case exposed the moral inconsistencies bound up with the abortion industry, as we note below. Even so, for those ethicists who acknowledge the full authority of Scripture, there is no room for any view that would justify the killing of infants, whether healthy

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or handicapped. To deliberately take the life of an infant is murder.

Since many of the arguments used to vindicate the widespread fatal neglect or actual killing of infants are the same as those used in the abortion issue, and since Bible-committed Christians do not debate the morality of killing an innocent person, we leave the question of infanticide and turn immediately to the abortion issue.

To set the context, consider the stages of human development:

1. Sperm. There are between 250 and 300 million spermatozoa in a single ejaculation.
2. Zygote. One sperm and the ovum unite (conception) within forty-eight hours of intercourse, and the fertilized ovum (also called the *conceptus*) makes its four-to-six-day journey down the fallopian tube, seeking implantation in the uterus (womb). Up to one-half of zygotes do not make it to implantation.
3. Embryo. The fertilized ovum or "egg" is implanted, and the embryo is established in its own individual life, though 4 percent of twins divide *after* implantation ("twinning"). On the other hand, there are cases where two eggs are released by the mother, both are fertilized, but because of their movement, they become one egg (called "recombination").
4. Fetus. The embryo has developed all human physical characteristics by about eight weeks and is called a fetus from then till birth.
5. Infant. Birth into physical independence of the mother, though, unlike most animals, still wholly dependent on others for survival.
6. Child
7. Youth
8. Adult

Killing of a human being at stages 5 (infant) through 8 (adult) has been considered a violation of the sixth commandment throughout church history. Killing sperm (stage 1) or preventing conception has been opposed by the Roman Catholic Church as sinful, but has not been opposed by most Protestant churches. The broader social debate involves stages 2 (zygote) through 4 (fetus).

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The Soul and the Beginning of Life

The crux of the issue is the question: At which stage does personhood or ensoulment begin?

What *is* the soul? The soul is who *you* are. Or you could say, "I am my soul." The soul is the center of personal awareness. The soul gives each of us our personal identity through all of our bodily changes. The body's cells are virtually entirely overhauled or replenished every seven years or so. So something nonphysical (the soul) must allow for this continuity through change. Even though the soul can survive bodily death, our body and soul function as an integrated and organic *whole.* When I (my soul) worry, this can set my stomach churning. And when I feel pain in my body, the soul (or "I") focuses attention on it. And when my body dies, my soul can continue to exist by God's sustaining power in the "intermediate state" (Lk 20:38; 23:43; 2 Cor 5:3-8; Phil 1:21, 23-24). At Christ's return, we will receive an immortal resurrection body. By the way, animals have "souls" too. Just as Adam is a "living soul" (*nepeš hayāh*, Gen 2:7), so are animals (Gen 1:24). But animal souls—which have far fewer capacities than that of humans, who are made in God's image—do not survive bodily death.[2]

Historically the church has debated the issue of ensoulment. When does the physical body possess a soul? Is it passed on through biological generation from one's parents? Does God create a soul and "implant" it in a human body? If so, at what stage does he do this? At conception? At implantation in the uterus? At some point beyond, such as "quickening"? Though Scripture does not expressly tell us, theologians have debated two main views throughout the church's history—the *creationist* and the *traducian* positions. According to the creationist view, the individual human soul (or person) comes into existence—is created by God—at the point of fertilization. The traducian view, by contrast, considers the soul as a continuation of the parents' souls, going all the way back to the original human couple. Like a *shoot* (*tradux* in Latin) that extends itself outward, so one's soul was not newly created by God at conception; rather, at fertilization, the soul of the parents is passed on to the offspring as an organic extension of the human "vine."

Whatever view is taken, the focus of the question is really on *when* a new

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individual comes into being. The question of the beginning of the "soul" is the key issue for Christians, for they want to know when the human soul comes into existence. After all, *that* is when human life truly begins. What is the status of all failed spermatozoa? What will become of spontaneously aborted zygotes and embryos? Are only fetuses reaching live birth ensouled? Even the concept of what the term *soul* means is difficult to determine from scriptural data, let alone when the soul begins. Though Scripture does not speak directly to the issue of when "ensoulment" takes place, does it offer any insights about the unborn? What insights can we gain from philosophical reflection on the biblical text?

Because of recent advances in our knowledge of prenatal life through three-dimensional sonograms, the scientific evidence reveals quite clearly the early traces of physical human characteristics. The contention of some pro-abortion advocates that the embryo is merely a tissue or organ of the mother, like her appendix, gave way in the seventies before the weight of scientific evidence. Virtually all agree that zygotes, embryos and fetuses are individuals of the human species with their own unique DNA code. Indeed, the unborn is totally dependent on the mother before birth as the infant is after birth, but the child pre- or post-natal has its own individuality. Surely a pregnant mother does not have two heads or a male sexual organ. We note that despite the appropriate concern shown by some protectors of sea turtle eggs, the same passion for protecting life is not extended to unborn humans.

There is no clear-cut logical demarcation in the development of human life from conception to adulthood. If it is argued that an embryo still lacks essential human characteristics, such as brain activity, it cannot be argued that the life of the fetus (from two or three months till birth) is biologically different from the life she will experience following birth. From conception onward, there is personal continuity and, given enough time, the human embryo will be a fully functioning adult.

So from a biological point of view there is little difference between aborting a fetus and killing an infant. An embryo, and especially a zygote, is qualitatively different, and it may not be possible to prove categorically that fully human biological life exists at that stage. But it would be

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impossible to prove that the zygote or embryo does not possess a fully human existence.

What of *twinning* (division after implantation) and *recombination* (two fertilized eggs becoming one)? Does this throw into question life's beginning? What of the beginning of the soul? First, there is no question we are speaking of something *human* and something *living.* Second, in either situation, the fertilized egg or conceptus is genetically unique. Third, there is no scientific consensus on certain dimensions of twinning, which could involve asexual reproduction (parthenogenesis). Consider how inseparable Siamese twins have distinct centers of awareness (souls) despite being joined in body. Some scientists think that some fertilized eggs are a basic duality before they divide. Fourth, the traducian view of the soul in particular—with its image of a vine-like shoot spreading out—could readily account for twinning and recombination. So we see that twinning and recombination do not present any good reason to reject that we are dealing with unique human life. One philosopher offers this analogy:

> Imagine that we lived in a world in which a certain small percentage of teenagers replicated themselves by some mysterious natural means, splitting in two upon reaching their sixteenth birthday. We would not in the least be inclined to conclude that no human being could therefore be considered a person prior to becoming sixteen years of age; nor would we conclude that life could be taken with greater impunity prior to replication than afterward. The real oddity—to press the parallel—would be two teenagers becoming one. However, in all of this we still would not judge the individual's claim to life to be undermined in any way. We might puzzle over questions of personal identity . . . but we would not allow these strange replications and fusions to influence our thinking about an individual's right to life. Nor therefore does it seem that such considerations are relevant in determining the point at which an individual might assume a right to life in utero.[3]

Someone like David Boonin will claim that we *don't know* exactly when during conception the human comes into existence. For example, is it when the sperm penetrates the ovum? Is it when the maternal and paternal chromosomes "cross over" into a two-chromosome (diploid) set? Or is it when the conceptus implants in the uterus? In response, we should not

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confuse *knowing* (epistemology) with *being* (ontology). Even if we cannot precisely *know* when a human comes into being, we can say that we have an *actual* unique human being at or close to conception. And we could challenge Boonin and others about their own claims: *At what point* does a human have a right to life? Exactly *when* does one arrive at the point of being sufficiently rational and self-aware?[4] Those advocating Boonin's view are far less sure and are far more vague and shady than the pro-life position's starting point. And even if one is uncertain about the *status* of the unborn, one should err on the side of caution and seek to protect unborn life rather than advocate killing it.

From a biological point of view, there is no question of unique personal identity that is genetically distinct from the mother, beginning at conception. From the time a mother knows she is expecting, the unborn already has a beating heart (three and a half weeks). Brain function is detectable at six weeks. At eight weeks, the unborn has distinctive limbs and even fingerprints. Even if it is "above one's pay grade" to know the moral status of the unborn, one should not actively promote killing the unborn in the name of "a woman's right to choose"—any more than a hunter shoots at something moving in the woods without knowing exactly what is moving. Ignorance on such an important issue should prompt restraint and caution rather than proceeding as though the issue did not matter.

So the debate has shifted from the question of when human life begins to the question of the *value* of various forms of life.

The Value of Life

Since the unborn are already a form of human life, many in the pro-life movement hold that abortion of zygote, embryo or fetus is a form of murder and must be outlawed by any moral society. At the other extreme are those who hold that there are differences of value among human lives and that not all human beings are "persons." In the landmark 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision of the Supreme Court, Justice Harry Blackmun introduced the concept of "useful life," suggesting that to end a life that is not useful may be not only permissible but actually mandatory for the ethically sensitive person. The key issue is said to be the "quality of life," not the "sanctity

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of life." The philosopher James Rachels distinguished between *biological* life (mere physical existence) and *biographical* life (a life infused with a sense of meaning and the capacity to live out that life). Between these two opposite viewpoints range the majority of specialists and ordinary people in America.

The right to choose. Common in political discourse is the language of women having "reproductive" or "privacy" rights or having a planned and wanted child. We hear that laws should be "kept off" a woman's body—although abortion is the ultimate invasion of it. And we are familiar with the claim that the woman—not the church or state—should determine her "fate." The woman has a right to protect *her* body, we're told. As some portray it, the unborn child is something of an unforeseen "invasion" into the woman's womb.

Philosopher Judith Jarvis Thomson came up with a much-discussed thought-experiment: You are kidnapped by music lovers and find yourself in a hospital hooked up to the body of an unconscious but ailing world-famous violinist; he is completely dependent on your circulatory system as you share the rarest of blood types. After nine months, the violinist will certainly recover, but he will die if you allow the tubes to be disconnected. What should be done? Thomson argues that if one finds a human being parasitically attached to him without his free consent and quite possibly at great risk to the host's physical health, then the host has no moral obligation to continue to sustain this life, even if—for the sake of argument—that person is fully human.[5] Is Thomson's comparison of a dependent violinist with an unborn child a valid one? No, it is not.

For one thing, the unborn child has not willfully "invaded" the womb. In the vast majority of cases, two freely consenting adults engaged in sexual activity; their union produced another human individual, whose natural environment is—or should be—the safety of a mother's womb. Second, the notion of kidnapping or something alien or parasitic being attached to you is emotionally loaded language; it is question begging (assuming what it wants to prove). Why not use the language of "mother" and "unborn child"? The mother-child connection just isn't a stranger-stranger relationship. Whereas the violinist is a *stranger,* the mother is connected to *her*

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own child and surely has a greater responsibility to that child. Doesn't a helpless, vulnerable, dependent child—born *or* unborn—have a claim to motherly care and protection from its own mother? Third, when it comes to abortion, we are not speaking here of merely *withholding* medical care from someone who is dying (see the next chapter on euthanasia). We are speaking of actively *destroying* an unborn life, which sometimes involves crushing its skull and dismembering it. Thomson's argument that this is merely "withholding" care is like smothering a person with a pillow, claiming this is simply withholding oxygen from that person.

What then of the "right to choose" language? It is laden with questionable assumptions. For one thing, right to choose *what*? "Choice" is a relative term—like saying "to the left of." A right to choose in relation to what? We gain moral clarity when we ask: What is the *object* of one's choice? Is one free to rape or murder? Obviously not. Second, the "right to choose" assumes an individualistic outlook that undermines community; it fails to welcome "the least of these" unborn children into the world, where they can be cared for and loved. Third, this mindset fails to see life as a gift from God and thus a charge to keep. We are not sovereign over our own lives or the lives of others God has entrusted to us. Fourth, we do not choose our earthly family (or spiritual family for that matter), yet we are called to committed love—to seek the well-being of others, even if doing so is inconvenient and even challenging. Abortion undermines the spirit of these loving commitments that make life meaningful.

Personhood. Unlike Thomson, most would agree that if the unborn are fully human persons, then their lives should not be taken. But how does one define "fully human" or "personhood"? Now, Father, Son and Spirit are *divine* persons in the Godhead, and there are *angelic* persons as well. Here we are discussing the category of *human* personhood.

Pro-abortionist philosophers such as Peter Singer and James Rachels attempt to define personhood along the psychological or social lines—for example, self-awareness, personal identity over time, rationality, social awareness, or possessing the desire for a certain kind of life ("quality of life"). Singer himself does not hide his animosity for the Jewish-Christian outlook and the idea of inviolable rights rooted in a God who made

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humans in his image. Others will claim that *recognizability* as a human, *viability* (the ability to survive outside the womb), or a certain level of *brain development* renders one human. These criteria can be used to judge whether the unborn can be killed or not. However, such suggestion wrongly anchors humanness or personhood in *function* rather than in *nature* or *essence.*

But what is more basic—the whole or the parts? Is essence or nature more fundamental than function? Essence (what makes us what we are) is more fundamental than function. Though we are designed by God to function as priest-kings in this world, we come with certain capacities to carry out these God-given tasks. That is, as humans, we come with certain essential capacities that make us human, even if we are not presently utilizing them. For example, humans have the capacity for self-awareness, but surely a person who is *sleeping* or *temporarily comatose* is still a full person even if her capacity for self-awareness is not being exercised. What about rationality? Our capability for rationality may be physically blocked by a blunt trauma to the head—or by Down syndrome or Alzheimer's. But if it would be possible for those physical blockages to be removed, then those inherent abilities bound up in human nature could be realized.

What about the criterion of having "human-like" physical characteristics to qualify one as a "person"? As ethicist Francis Beckwith points out, mannequins look quite "human" but are far from being human. A hundred-year-old woman will look quite different from a healthy newborn, but who would dispute that both are human? Whether the malformed Elephant Man or the midget, they belong to the species *homo sapiens,* and their divinely endowed worth is to be protected. What of the criterion of "viability" outside the womb? Of course, given the increased sophistication of medical technology, this depends on *where* one lives. Viability will be earlier in the United States than in tribal West Africa. And before modern medicine, viability was significantly later than it is today. Is the humanity of the unborn so arbitrary that it depends on the era or geographic location in which one lives?

The biblical concept of "the image of God" assumes that our role as priest-kings in this world involves the essentially human capacity to reason,

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know God, make choices, create culture, appreciate beauty and relate deeply. This recognition of human dignity inspired both the modern human rights movement[6] and the bioethics movement of the 1960s. It highlighted the sacredness of humans, regardless of their stage of development or physical condition. Daniel Callahan, a leader in the bioethics movement and cofounder of the Hastings Center, writes, "When I first became interested in bioethics in the mid-1960s, the only resources were theological or those drawn from within the traditions of medicine, themselves heavily shaped by religion."[7] Likewise, A. R. Jonsen's account of the "birth of bioethics" credits the influence of the "Judeo-Christian religious tradition"[8] The "founding father" of the modern bioethics was Paul Ramsey (1913–1988), a Methodist professor. He took for granted that human value is "ultimately grounded in the value God is placing on it" and that no person "is ever much more than a fellow fetus."[9]

What of the idea of a "useful life" or "biographical life" as the basis for establishing a legal right to life? Leo Alexander, director of the neurobiologic unit in the division of psychiatric research at Boston State Hospital and formerly serving with the Office of the Chief of Counsel for War Crimes, Nuremberg, documented how the "rational utility" principle (or "what is useful?") guided medical thought in Germany between the two world wars; it came to displace fundamental moral and religious values. Under the Nazis, this Hegelian principle led to using "human experimental material" in medico-military research and to exterminate the "useless" in society—the chronically ill or the socially or racially unwanted.[10] Such elitist definitions of true personhood or what is "worthy life" not only led eventually to the attempted extermination of the Jewish race; in an earlier era it led to the enslavement of vast numbers of black "nonpersons." The definition of some as subhuman or less worthy was the implication of the Dred Scott decision by our Supreme Court (1857), and it lay at the root of American justification of the slave system. Today it is used to justify abortion of unborn children.

Journalist Malcolm Muggeridge, commenting on the same phenomenon, points out that the process began with the concept of the "value of life" and at first was applied only to severely, chronically ill, but it was

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gradually expanded until, under Hitler, it became the Holocaust. And he argued that the "abortion issue is far and away the most important one now facing what we continue to call Western Civilization."[11]

Mother Teresa once said that nations refusing to welcome children by aborting them are the poorest of nations. Death comes to the unborn simply because they are an inconvenience, and the widespread practice of abortion is a clear sign that we live in a "culture of death."

Biblical Evidence

Scripture does not directly address the issue of abortion. This does not mean that God is indifferent to the issue any more than the Bible's lack of direct teaching on suicide and euthanasia indicates moral neutrality. "You shall not murder" is the overarching principle and covers all varieties of intentionally taking innocent human life. As we note later, Scripture indicates that the justifiable taking of human life includes just warfare, capital punishment, and self-defense. So do unborn human beings bear the image of God?

Most serious discussions of the biblical evidence for or against abortion wrestle with Exodus 21:22-25—the passage about two men fighting who accidentally injure a pregnant woman (and her unborn child). Two alternative translations are in view: she is struck and (a) "gives birth prematurely" or (b) she "has a miscarriage." If the translation should be "gives birth prematurely," the context and language suggest that further injury or "harm" could apply to *both* the woman and the unborn. If "has a miscarriage" is correct, then the penalty when an unborn child dies is merely a fine; if there is "further injury" to the woman, the penalty is proportional—"life for life, eye for eye." Thus, some claim that the unborn has lesser value since only a fine is required. On the other hand, some argue that the Hebrew word *yālad* should be translated "give birth [prematurely]" rather than "have a miscarriage." It means "go forth" or "give birth," describing a normal birth (Gen 25:26; 38:28-30; Job 3:11; 10:18; Jer 1:5; 20:18); it is always used of giving birth, never of miscarriage.

Even so, since any death—whether of the mother or the unborn—would be *accidental,* a "life for life" scenario would *not* apply. Rather, a *fine*

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was typically demanded, as in the case of the goring ox (Ex 21:28-30). Also, in manslaughter cases (accidental death), the cities of refuge were made available (Num 25). So this passage is not decisive. Even if the penalties for killing a mother and the unborn were different, it does not follow that the unborn is less than human. And, again, accidental death is different from willfully killing, as with an abortion.

In Psalm 139, we do find strong support for the value of the unborn—the psalmist being the same self or "I" as the one developing being in the womb.

> For you created my inmost being;
> you knit me together in my mother's womb.
> I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
> your works are wonderful,
> I know that full well.
> My frame was not hidden from you
> when I was made in the secret place,
> when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.
> Your eyes saw my unformed body;
> all the days ordained for me were written in your book
> before one of them came to be. (Ps 139:13-16 NIV)

The Bible consistently refers to conception when speaking of the beginning of one's personal history. Genesis 4:1 says, "Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain." Job lamented, "Let the day perish on which I was to be born, and that night which said, 'A boy is conceived'" (Job 3:3). David traced his own identity back to conception, acknowledging, "In sin my mother conceived me" (Ps 51:5).

An interesting account of fetal life is recorded in Luke 1. John the Baptist, a fetus of six months, leaps for joy (Lk 1:44) at the arrival of his cousin Jesus, who was in the earliest stages of prenatal development. Elizabeth addresses Mary as "the mother of my Lord" (Lk 1:43), not as "the future mother of my *potential* Lord."

The common references in Scripture to God's interest and call to people while still in their mothers' wombs would be conclusive evidence that God considers these "fully human." What about when God uses similar terminology of people before *conception:* "Before I formed you in the womb I

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knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you" (Jer 1:5; cf. Eph 1:4). This does not refer to personal *existence* before birth. Mormons make that very claim. But to actually sustain that argument, Jeremiah would also be able to say *to God,* "And before *You* formed me in the womb, I knew *You*!" Rather, this text speaks of God's *foreknowledge* and purposing to use individuals as prophets or to form a people for himself.

The biblical evidence suggests that the biblical writers saw a continuity between the prenatal and postnatal states. This is supported by the scientific and philosophical evidence, which points us to strongly affirming the continuity of a person or self who bears the divine image beginning at conception. The soul or self or "I" that you are today began at conception and has continued to the present; the human self is a uniquely created being who has a right or claim to protection and care at each stage of life. As Dr. Seuss's *Horton Hears a Who* reminds us, "A person is a person, no matter how small."

Abortion as Murder

Should a person who performs an abortion or who requests one be subject to the same penalties as one who kills a child or an adult? Why do we not name a miscarried embryo and hold a funeral service for it? Why do parents not grieve in the same way, especially when the spontaneous abortion is early? Should the teenager, who, seduced and distraught, takes a "morning-after pill" be treated as if she murdered an adult? In our estimation, the abortion of a zygote or embryo is morally wrong because it bears God's image from conception onward in a continuous personal existence extending beyond earthly life. That said, one who commits such an abortion should not be treated as one who commits premeditated murder.

What, then, is the sin? Both ancient Jewish law and contemporary law hold a person responsible for criminal neglect or reckless behavior that is not aimed deliberately at any person but results in harm or death. It is morally wrong—a violation of God's law—and even the Hippocratic Oath took for granted the wrongness of abortion. While we believe that preventing conception before, during or after intercourse is not of itself wrong, the abortion of a zygote or embryo is a sin of reckless violence. Should this

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act then be criminalized? Should women having abortions be thrown into prison? We do not believe so.

Even before 1973, many state laws against abortion attempted to strike a balance of considerations. They sought to uphold the sanctity of the unborn by criminalizing the *abortionist* who engaged in directly killing the unborn—particularly gruesome later in the third-trimester, when skulls would be crushed and bodies dismembered. These laws also took for granted that women seeking abortions tended to be *vulnerable* and *desperate.* In our culture, ignorance about abortion is far more widespread, and many are not convinced that the unborn are part of the human community. Women seeking abortions are not given the facts about the full humanity of the unborn, but are told that what is in their womb is "the product of conception" or "a blob of tissue." As it turns out, women are the *second* victims of abortion, commonly pressured by boyfriends or husbands into having an abortion, and then potentially dealing with regret and guilt as they may realize later that they have taken a human life.[12]

Attempts to Justify Abortion

How should such a position be applied to the many difficult problems and issues that arise in this great contemporary moral issue?

Economic and social well-being. This is probably the most trivial reason for violating the right to life of another human, but it is also probably the most common motivation for abortion. It appears that, second only to the drive for personal autonomy, the desire for freedom from the limitations of parenting and for an affluent lifestyle are primary motivations behind the pro-choice movement. Of course, for those—especially in many non-Western countries—where the desire is not for affluence but for escape from grinding poverty, the motivation may be somewhat higher. But the irony is that poor people are not the chief abortion advocates. In fact, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, a chief advocate of the poor, considered abortion to be the greatest crime. Says Teresa, "It is a very, very great poverty to decide that a child must die that you may live as you wish."

What about deaths through back-alley abortions if abortion were illegal? The number of deaths of mothers under the old system has been

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greatly inflated. In 1971, two years before the *Roe v. Wade* decision, there were only sixty-eight deaths from illegal abortions and abortion attempts in the entire United States. Compare that with fifty-five million deaths of the unborn since 1973.

Mental health of the mother. Of higher value than her material welfare is the mental welfare of the mother. But is the potential of psychological damage to be compared with the certain loss of life and the possible agony of a violent, painful and protracted dying? Regardless of who is on what side of the abortion debate, the mother and the unborn child must not be pitted against each other. And if the pro-abortion side is solely concerned about the mother's well-being, then it should acknowledge the dangers to the mother who chooses abortion. In 2011, a study published in the *British Journal of Psychiatry* showed how abortion has been linked to significant increased risk of not only depression and anxiety, but social phobia (61 percent), suicide ideation (59 percent) and various types of substance abuse (ranging from 142 to 313 percent).[13]

Life of the mother. Historically, Protestants have justified taking the life of the unborn when a continued pregnancy would put the life of the mother in jeopardy. For example, an ectopic pregnancy—when the fertilized egg is trapped in the fallopian tubes—will lead to certain death for *both* the mother and the unborn. There may be other scenarios in which the mother or the unborn may live, but not both. Most Protestants would argue that preserving the mother's life has a self-defense justification, in addition to having to choose in a "tragic necessity" scenario—preserving the life of the wife and, possibly, mother of others so as to prevent a greater loss to the family and even to society. We should add that Roman Catholic teaching insists that unless *both* lives are in jeopardy, to deliberately take the life of one merely to avert the danger of loss to the other is not deemed ethically justifiable.

Whatever the outcome of the debate over unborn-life versus mother-life, the practical truth is that, due to the rapid advances of medical science, this dilemma is extraordinarily rare. Abortion is not justifiable based on the rarest of cases. In virtually all cases, taking innocent human life can be avoided.

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Unwanted children. "No one should be forced to bring an unwanted child into the world." This argument is possibly the least worthy. In the first place, many unwanted children at birth become very much wanted. Babies have a way with people. Furthermore, it can hardly be said that any child is unwanted in the present-day United States where the desire to adopt seems almost limitless. This is a clear, practical answer for unmarried mothers, who account for the vast majority of abortions. If the unborn were not human beings, the question of their wantedness may have some validity, but since they are human, the claim of unwantedness has no more merit than it would have in the case of the unwanted child who has already been born. Do we say, "No parent should be forced to *raise* an unwanted child"?

This question raises another: What happens to unwanted children? Do not unwanted children become abused children? Is it fair to bring a child into the world who must face such a future? This argument is not used for children and adults who may face possibly unpleasant futures—otherwise, the entire race would be in jeopardy. True, many now advocate suicide as preferable to continued intolerable suffering, but suicide is self-chosen; abortion is not. Before the 1973 Supreme Court decision it was said that abortion on demand would reduce child abuse, but during the first decade following that decision, even though fifteen million unwanted children were aborted, child abuse climbed nearly 400 percent. One study showed that 90 percent of battered children were from *planned* pregnancies. But the truth is: *abortion is the ultimate child abuse,* and violence against the unborn seems to create an atmosphere—both personal and social—in which violence to the already born proves to be less abhorrent. Abortion is an insult to a culture of life.

To say that a woman does not "want" a being she has helped bring into existence is a gross betrayal of the life-compact already entered into; this is quite hypocritical. Why not rather face the consequences of one's past choices and make sure that the child *is* wanted, either by the natural parent(s) or by others who stand in line awaiting the opportunity to adopt? This is a more honorable, civilized and moral way than killing.

One further word concerning wantedness. In every place where the pre-

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natal determination of sex has become commonplace (such as India and China), unborn females have been aborted far out of proportion to males. How ironic that women, seeking to assert their rights at the expense of their own children's right to life, actually open the way to a perverse "gendercide"—a frontal assault in what turns out to be a genuine "war on women."

All of this discussion should remind us who oppose the constitutional right to abortion to take responsibility to assist mothers with unwanted pregnancies. Not only should we oppose abortion, but we have a moral obligation to work toward providing alternatives. We can affirm a culture of life by caring for and even opening our homes or providing shelter for unwed mothers, not to mention involvement through foster care and adoption. We can assist parents who cannot cope with special medical or financial needs. We must demonstrate our love for mothers as we seek to protect their unborn children. Compassion with tears is more appropriate in creating a culture of life than anger and bitter words.

Rape, incest and the handicapped. In the case of rape and incest, the new life did not originate through any choice of the mother; so the responsibility of the mother is of a different kind. What to do now is her *first* choice, not her second.

Ultimately, however, the answer to the terrible dilemma faced by a girl or woman who finds herself pregnant under such circumstances depends on whether the unborn is a human being. If it is, no matter what the source, to destroy it is wrong. A *second* act of violence cannot correct the *first.* The mother's lack of responsibility for the conception does not remove the child's God-given right to life. The unborn child is not the attacker but is, in fact, a second victim, who should not receive capital punishment for its father's crime.

There is a further problem concerning legislation that permits abortion in cases of rape or incest. Such laws invite trivialization of the crime of rape since women with unwanted pregnancies often have used this exception as a loophole, claiming to be victims of rape when in fact no rape occurred. If the rape is reported immediately, no legal exception would be needed, as the procedure would normally be contraceptive rather than abortive.

With increased sophistication in prenatal diagnosis, potential birth de-

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fects are more easily detected. As a result, up to 90 percent of the handicapped are aborted.[14] That said, it is better to suffer harm than to inflict it, and the response to the unborn child with a physical handicap is not to eliminate the little one but to care for her. If the fetus is human, then this unborn handicapped human, like the handicapped child or adult, has the right to life. Furthermore, in all but the few extreme cases, physical handicap does not need to mean a life not worth living. On the contrary, "The suicide rate among handicapped people is virtually zero."[15] One survey indicates that 99 percent of adults with Down syndrome report that they are happy with their lives.[16]

Blessing and benefit come not only to the handicapped, but also to the caregivers, many of whom deepen in their compassion and even their courage while tending to the needs of others. This is movingly depicted in the book *Bright Valley of Love*—the true story of daring, courageous love in an effort to protect handicapped children in danger of Nazi extermination.[17] Indeed, caregivers often find themselves "humanized" in attending to the needs of others. University of North Florida English professor Chris Gabbard tells of his young son August (when he was ten) who has cerebral palsy; he is completely nonverbal and cognitively nonfunctional and must wear a diaper. Before August was born, Gabbard followed Peter Singer's thinking, confessing to prizing intellectual ability and despising "poor mental function." When his son was born, he entered the intensive-care nursery with deep ambivalence: "What most stirred me was the way he resembled me. Nothing had prepared me for this, the shock of recognition, for he was the boy in my own baby pictures, the image of me when I was an infant." Gabbard acknowledges that he cannot take vacations and that medical costs are significant. Nevertheless, he announces, "August, along with my daughter and my wife, is the most amazing and wonderful thing that has ever happened to me, for he has allowed me an additional opportunity to profoundly love another human being."[18]

Abortion Law

Despite the slogans, morality *is* legislated at least to some degree—against, say, rape, theft or murder. The *legal,* however, is not the *moral,* we

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have noted. Adultery or homosexual activity is immoral, but this does not mean these should be criminalized. But if abortion is the taking of innocent human life, however, it should be made illegal. But some say that laws enforcing the private religious convictions of some citizens should not be imposed on all. There is an element of truth in this. If laws are made that the broader community has no intention of enforcing, it is bad law as it promotes a lawless society. But to call abortion a private matter is far off the mark. Abortion immediately involves the unborn child, quickly involves others, such as the father, and soon has an impact on all society. In mainland China today, where 13 million abortions take place per year (in contrast to 1.6 million in the United States), the one-child policy has led to millions of sex-selection abortions favoring males, resulting in huge social problems that come with a huge shortage of women, including kidnapping women from neighboring countries to serve as brides for Chinese men.

Appealing to the "right to privacy" cannot be absolutized. If one's private religious convictions demanded that he hold slaves, have many wives, discriminate against blacks, or mutilate Asians, these same liberal defenders of personal rights and freedoms would seek for legislation to stop him. The key questions are: *Whose* rights—those of the mother or the unborn? and, *which* rights—the right to life of the infant or some lesser rights of the mother?

As we've noted, half a loaf is better than none, and political debate may involve compromises on *policy*—though not on *principle*—in order to save as many lives as possible. For example, it is better to work toward laws prohibiting late-term abortions and taxpayer funding for abortions, requiring that parents be notified before their pregnant teenage daughter has an abortion, or requiring that an expecting mother see her child on a sonogram before choosing abortion, even if this means permitting abortion in cases of, say, rape or incest. After all, hard cases make bad laws. So while we should do all we can to protect innocent human life, on a political level we may need to work incrementally. All the while, we should seek, with God's help, to change hearts and minds through education, persuasion and even conversion rather than forcing legislation on an unpersuaded popu-

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lation; this would likely both create a cultural backlash and harm the cause for defending unborn life.

Furthermore, the church needs to challenge the presumed individualism embedded in the pro-abortion position. For example, if a teenage girl in our public school systems takes an aspirin at school, the school nurse notifies her parents; if she becomes pregnant, she can have an abortion without parental notification. It is this autonomous individualism that strikes at the heart of human community, which should welcome other humans, no matter how small. The presumed sovereignty of the individual opposes the fact that life is a sovereignly bestowed divine gift—one which humans can neither give nor take away. To seek meaning and fulfillment within one's own inner being fails to understand the kinds of commitments and virtuous character that make life meaningful. In word and deed, Christians should oppose such shallow individualism. They can model what true human community in Christ—the truest human—should look like. They can dedicate themselves to being a caring, loving community (Jn 13:35)—one that displays the beauty of a divinely grounded "culture of life" by welcoming children into our midst and caring for the helpless of all ages. This community in Christ has the privilege of persuading hearts and minds about the necessary protection of the most helpless of humans and of advocating for laws respecting human life from conception to natural death. As we have noted, a caring community demonstrates and nurtures what true humanity looks like.

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Suicide, Euthanasia and Other Medical Ethical Considerations

Suicide and euthanasia, like abortion and infanticide, have generated intense controversy because of new attitudes developing in the West. And, we should add, biblical responses to these issues are remarkably parallel to responses to abortion. As with abortion and infanticide, Scripture does not address these issues directly. Until recently, the major church bodies have always condemned all four activities as violations of the sixth commandment.

Not all societies have condemned suicide and euthanasia. In Japan, for example, suicide to expiate one's lost or threatened honor is heroic. Even as an escape from intolerable circumstances, suicide is quite acceptable. Japanese Christians have spoken of the ecstatic feeling of freedom they experienced in their pre-Christian days as they journeyed to some special scenic spot, hallowed as the trysting place with death by countless suicides, and of their disappointment when their plan for suicide was thwarted.

Now, increasing numbers in the West espouse similar views. Groups that endorse suicide produce detailed handbooks on how it may best be committed. Scholars writing their tomes and pragmatic lobbyists engaging in their state legislatures promote new ways for family and others to find a "good death" (*euthanasia*) or "death with dignity" for the sufferer. The late Jack Kevorkian ("Dr. Death") dedicated himself to physician-assisted suicide for those desiring his services.

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Why the new, more lenient attitudes? Do they well up from long-suppressed reservoirs of compassion, or do they come from an overall depreciation of the value of life? If a person is no more than a time-bound animal produced by valueless, mindless, material processes, having no hope beyond the grave, why should human life be viewed as "sacred"?

The Christian view of mortal human life is both higher and lower than the secularist's. It is higher because humans are created in God's image, belong to God and will continue to live beyond death. The secularist views humans as advanced rational animals facing extinction. On the other hand, to the Christian, our earthly human life is temporary and not the ultimate value; for the secularist, this life is the only existence humans will ever have, and so any value—perhaps ultimate value—is to be found in their earth-bound life.

Thus, in the paradox, to the believer life and death are simultaneously more significant and less significant than to the unbeliever. True believers do not cling to life because they cannot lose it and because it does not belong to them anyway. In fact, by losing our lives, as Christ commanded, rather than by grasping or clutching it, we find it in its full, true meaning. We become truly human in the likeness of Jesus, the archetype of humanity. On the other hand, life is a gift from God and belongs ultimately to him. We do not "own" our lives or have an intrinsic "right" to life; rather we hold it in sacred trust as one of the highest values. One's own life is not higher in value than truth, honor, justice and love, for example. But certainly the life of another is a far higher value than one's own higher comfort, ease, material prosperity, or a host of other self-oriented rights and privileges. Indeed, Scripture treats human life as so sacred that a society's view of the value of human life is a sure test of its moral integrity and social durability.

Suicide

Suicide as a sin. Hemlock Society founder Derek Humphry wrote a 1991 bestseller, *Final Exit,* subtitled *The Practicalities of Self-Deliverance and Assisted Suicide for the Dying.* Though written for those terminally ill and seeking "quiet release," this type of book could "assist" the hundreds of thousands of teenagers who "fail" in their suicide attempts. If a person is

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master of his fate, why not expand the possibility of suicide to the physically healthy but despairing in mind? In his book Humphry writes, "If you consider God the master of your fate, read no further. Seek the best pain management available and arrange hospice care."[1]

Suicide is wrong because it violates the prohibition of intentionally taking innocent human life. It is nowhere condoned in Scripture either directly or by implication. Nevertheless, difficult problems inhere in this prohibition and seem to cluster around two opposite poles. At one pole, is suicide so light a sin, so unlike murder, that attempted suicide should go unpunished? At the other extreme, is successful suicide an unpardonable sin?

How wrong is suicide? There is tension between two biblical principles. Believers are not the owners of their bodies, and the same is true for unbelievers—life is a gift from God, whether one acknowledges God or not. Furthermore, the believer's body is the home—the temple—of God himself. So suicide is very serious—a violation of our creation and redemption. On the other hand, our lives belong to us in a sense that others' lives do not, so that violence to our own body would seem to be less a sin than violence to another's body.

How bad a sin is suicide? No matter how we may seek to excuse suicide, it is a sin requiring repentance and God's forgiveness. The act of suicide is not against oneself alone. Others are affected, often tragically. Many times this is the deliberate intent. Yet suicide may well reveal a failure of the community to care for the desperately needy in its midst.

However, no matter how serious a sin, it is certainly forgivable, as any other sin. The difference between this sin and most others is that for other sins there is normally a period of grace following the sin to permit repentance. Repentance is necessary to restore fellowship broken through sin (1 Jn 1:8). Yet theologians who believe one's salvation can *never* be lost—and those who believe it *can* be—typically deny that a single sin would forfeit salvation. Would a Christian, suddenly enraged and suffering a heart attack, go to meet God unforgiven? Is anger in such circumstances an unpardonable sin? No, a suicide of one of God's children, though "crashing uninvited" into God's presence, is not unpardonable to the Father because of One who deliberately gave his own life to forgive all of our sins (Col 2:13).

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Suicide as a crime. Suicide is clearly a sin, violating God's law, but American society does not treat it as a crime—those who attempt suicide are not prosecuted as attempted murderers. Neither do we punish people who deceive themselves, who destroy or waste their own possessions. We may think them misguided or sick, but not criminal, as would be the case if they did these things to others. The government has a responsibility to protect against the taking of innocent human life, but since suicide has not been treated as a crime, it may be difficult to punish those who assist others' suicides.

Even so, assisting with suicide should *not* be decriminalized. This involves the intentional taking of *another* innocent human life. Throughout history, doctors swearing by the ancient Hippocratic Oath have vowed, "I will neither give a deadly drug to anybody if asked for it, nor will I make the suggestion to this effect." This oath stood in opposition to abortion as well. The vocation of doctors is to help, not harm—to heal, not annihilate. They promise not to kill even when asked to do so. It is not compassionate to take another's life when asked—no more so than if a doctor complied when asked by his patient to have sex with him because she was lonely and needy.

The practice of medicine requires personal confidentiality and profound trust. And if a doctor is legally permitted to kill, how could any patient entrust herself to him? As Stanley Hauerwas writes, "It may be that the demand for euthanasia comes because we lack the skills humanely to know how to be with and care for the dying. . . . Humans never kill more readily than when we kill in the name of mercy."[2] Often "mercy" at the end of life springs not from compassion but from inconvenience. Though we do not seek suffering, we must recognize that we cannot insulate ourselves from it or from the suffering who need our compassion. This means caring for those who cannot care for themselves, refusing to give up on those who themselves feel like giving up.

Self-sacrifice. Self-sacrificially laying down one's life for another is not sinful suicide. If it were, God himself would be the guiltiest. No one took Christ's life from him. He laid it down of his own volition (Jn 10:18). In fact, "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn 15:13 RSV). Far from being the worst of crimes, it is the greatest of virtues. The mother allowing herself to starve in order to feed her

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children, the friend leaving another with the life jacket and swimming off into the night—these are heroes, not sinners.

Refusing medical care. Another form of self-chosen death that can hardly be considered sinful or criminal is refusing necessary medical attention—foolish, perhaps, but not sinful. We do not agree with those who think that using medicine is wrong—that it is a sign of unbelief. That said, it would be very difficult, on biblical grounds, to condemn as sinful or criminal those who choose "the way of faith." The Bible is full of promises about God's healing power, even if incidental passages show a lower regard for medical procedures (e.g., Mk 5:26). And Paul himself advises Timothy to take wine for his stomach's sake (1 Tim 5:23).

Throughout Scripture, we see instances of trusting in God's deliverance from death or sickness—although with an assumption that while God *can* readily heal or deliver, he is not *obligated* to: "He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But even if He does not . . ." (Dan 3:17-18). Yet we also see sickness as an inevitable part of a fallen world (2 Cor 12:7-10; Phil 2:26-27; 1 Tim 5:23; 2 Tim 4:20; Jas 5:14-15). This is not the place to present scriptural evidence that medical help is not only legitimate, but a gift of God; indeed, it is part of God's common grace to humankind. However, we must grant liberty to those who interpret Scripture to mean that the way of faith precludes medical help.

One final word concerning the ethics of suicide. Often in the life of the victim of suicide there are those who deliberately or through insensitivity helped create an environment that the suicidal person eventually judged to be intolerable. In the final analysis, though, a person is responsible for her own choices; the family and friends of the victim cannot bear the guilt of that person's choice. Repentance may be needed for whatever real or imagined complicity may exist, but to continue to bear a burden of guilt is to deny the grace of God.

Euthanasia

In 1900, the average life expectancy in the United States was 48 years. A third of all children died before the age of 18, and epidemics and infectious diseases took the lives of many children and adults in the twentieth century.

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But we also saw breakthroughs, with Fleming's discovery of penicillin (1943), effective treatment for tuberculosis (1951), dialysis for kidney failure (1960) and vaccinations to prevent the spread of infectious disease. Thus by 2011, the average life expectancy in the United States had risen to 77.9 years—a thirty-year jump in a little over a century! This means that people are living longer, but this often comes with debilitation later in life.[3] Serious debilities may prompt some to take their own lives—or to seek the assistance of others in doing so.

Killing others deliberately, whatever the motive, violates God's law and should be condemned by human law. But what of the agony of seeing a loved one suffer—or of the burden of astronomical medical costs in prolonging the dying process?

Though not directly related to euthanasia, the Danish, in a national display of courage, went to great lengths to protect vulnerable Jews during World War II. When other nations, including the United States, were turning away imperiled Jews, the Danish government not only resisted Nazi demands to hand them over; it also raised funds to provide passage to Sweden by boat to tens of thousands of them. Despite great risks, the Danish were a beautiful display of a life-affirming culture. How we treat life—from the unborn in the womb to those dying while under hospice care—is an indication of how civilized or uncivilized we are. How we treat individual human life—especially the weak and vulnerable—is a test of not only society's moral integrity, but also its social durability.

Caring versus curing. Many have recognized that caring for those with chronic illness reveals the kind of people we are. In sacrificially caring for others, we celebrate a love for life—for theirs and ours—as well as the God who sovereignly gives life as well as calls us to be a caring community.[4] Doctors and other caregivers must always care, even when they cannot cure. Though incurable diseases and terminally ill patients may be a blow to the pride of doctors, incurability does not justify euthanizing patients. We must recognize inevitable human limitations, the inescapability of death and the moral obligation to care even when there is no cure.

Distinctive physical conditions: Brain death, persistent vegetative state and coma. It may be helpful here to distinguish between three rel-

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evant medical conditions.[5] *Brain death* occurs when certain cerebral functions are lost—consciousness/awareness, motor control, and brain-stem functions such as cough and gag reflexes, eye movement and respiration. This is commonly taken to be a leading indicator of death. Brain death—in conjunction with heart and lung death—are key indicators of the cessation of earthly life.

Persistent vegetative state (PVS) is an irreversible condition resulting from damaged cerebral hemispheres, though with a continued functioning brain stem, which is not as vulnerable to lack of oxygen and blood flow. Gag- and cough-reflexes remain with an eyes-open consciousness and wake-sleep cycles. This condition can continue indefinitely.

A *comatose* state is an eyes-closed, sleeplike state of unarousability due to extensive damage to the reticular activating system—a network of intercellular fibers—of the brain stem. The coma can be "transient" (diabetic coma) or permanent. If the patient does not recover, the coma either turns to brain death or PVS state.

Active and passive euthanasia. Though there are exceptions (e.g., ectopic pregnancy), intentionally taking innocent human life is wrong. This is fundamental to the ancient Hippocratic Oath—from the beginning of life (refusing to give an abortion-inducing drug) to the end of life (refusing to assist in bringing about someone's death, even if asked). Unlike the late Jack Kevorkian, doctors by definition ought to care even when they cannot cure. They should always refuse to take innocent life.

Ethicists have distinguished between *active* and *passive* euthanasia. *Actively* promoting death has been universally condemned in the Western world under the Hippocratic Oath, taken by all medical practitioners until recently. *Passive* euthanasia, by contrast, is morally permissible since it is the dying process—indicated by, though not restricted to, the shutting down of the three "great organs" (heart, lungs, brain)—that kills a person; it is not due to withdrawing or withholding medical treatment such as a respirator or a heart machine. Because removing these machines does not produce death, one cannot rightly view this action as the intentional taking of innocent human life.

There are some distinctions to make related to active and passive euthanasia.

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Withholding and withdrawing. Another distinction—but one without a difference—is *withdrawing* and *withholding medical care.* Ethically speaking, these are identical. While *withholding* medical treatment is sometimes viewed as immoral by some, more will likely feel guilty for taking a person off life-support (*withdrawing*) because they incorrectly think that withdrawing somehow causes death. In actual fact, it is the dying process already at work in the body that brings about death, not the withdrawal of technology. A terminally ill patient taken off a ventilator might continue to breathe on her own, but if she dies, it is because her body has been shutting down.

The "principle of double-effect" is relevant here. For example, to ease pain with morphine, say, while one is dying may slightly hasten death. But the intention is not to facilitate death but simply to make the patient more comfortable.

In contemplating these matters, we should avoid two opposite extremes—*trying to hasten death* and *refusing to acknowledge inevitable death.* There comes a point when fighting death is useless and we should thus recognize we are not under obligation to try to prolong the inevitable. On the other hand, we should not hasten the coming of death either. Neither trying to hasten death nor prolonging it unnecessarily counts as *care* for fellow humans. Actually, each is a form of *abandonment* rather than *caring.*[6]

Ordinary and heroic. Another distinction divides medical techniques into ordinary and heroic. The distinction, particularly at the borderline between the two, is difficult to draw. But the reasoning is clear that when a person faces certain, imminent death, it is morally permissible to withdraw—or refrain from using—the kind of extraordinary (and expensive) treatment that would be mandatory when the dying process can be reversed, say, when a person is in a coma after an auto accident. A terminally ill person may choose to stay at home under hospice care—with only a portable oxygen tank and morphine injections as needed—rather than undergo chemotherapy with the slimmest chance of success. The real-life situation is always complex, but the distinction is legitimate and may prove helpful on occasion.

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Note that this argument applies only to those who are clearly in the irreversible process of dying and is not legitimate in the treatment of infants, for example, who could, with medical assistance, live many years. Extraordinary measures are justified to buy time for additional treatment or for the patient's normal organ functions again to take over. If the organs such as the kidneys or liver—but, particularly, the great organs—can no longer function, such means are no longer justified.

Normal and "heroic": Nutrition, hydration and medical treatment. A young Florida woman, Terri Schiavo, had her feeding tube removed in March 2005 even though she was not dying. She was in a persistent vegetative state, having eyes-open consciousness and the ability to express herself in limited ways to those caring for her. Despite her biological family's commitment to care for her, Schiavo's husband, who was engaged to another woman with whom he had two children, insisted—without supporting documentation—that his wife would have wanted her feeding tube removed. Schiavo was starved to death.

All things being equal, nutrition and hydration are normal and expected for the sustenance of the body—for basic survival. Food and water are not technically "medical care," which targets a particular pathology or wards off some attack on bodily well-being (*therapeutic*). Removing food and water, however, is to remove *normal* care, and this will inevitably result in death. To give dehydrated patients intravenous fluids to hydrate them is not a "heroic measure." Yes, this may be "artificial," but isn't using a spoon or bottle-feeding a baby with formula as well?[7]

Now, in special cases, a dying person may simply stop eating—a common sign that the body is shutting down and that death is near. Or, if a dying person is unconscious and on the brink of death, administering food and water at this stage will make no actual difference. In such extreme cases, food and water are actually unnecessary in the caregiving process. And the condition of some patients may well mean that eating even puréed food brings on the risk of choking and breathing difficulty.

One further matter: studies have shown that tube-feeding ("enteral feeding") certain patients—those with advanced dementia, for instance—who cannot be fed orally may come with various risks. Also, this procedure

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may offer no significant advantage for them in prolonging survival, improving function, or increasing weight gain.[8]

Responsibility in decision making. For whatever reason, a person has the right to refuse medical treatment, which should not be misunderstood as promoting the taking of innocent life. Those who counsel the sufferer, whether pastor, family, physician or friends, have the ethical responsibility to assist him in making his own free, informed choice and to refrain from any subtle influence, not to speak of psychological coercion or social manipulation.

We said earlier that *all human beings* are created with a fundamental dignity that cannot be diminished or taken away based on the stage of one's life or one's level of function. Yet some promote a "death with dignity," which typically assumes a person can "take control" of her final moments—even to end her own life.

We would say three things in response. First, there is *no dignity* in taking one's own life—or being assisted in doing so; life is a gift from God, and taking one's own life is an affront to the Creator. Surely we would not want to say to a severely depressed, but otherwise healthy, twenty-five-year-old that he can justifiably commit suicide—to "die with dignity" in the name of autonomy. No, dignity involves much more than life-or-death choices, and the most fundamental dignity of all—the universal dignity of human life—is not something we chose or of which we can rid ourselves.

Second, there are, frankly, many indignities and embarrassments that come at the end of life—loss of bowel function, having a disfiguring or disabling stroke, falling on one's face while having a heart attack. Medical personnel and family should do what they can to show grace and to prevent anything *undignified* to intrude, even if there may be *indignities.*

Third, preserving autonomy is one way to prevent a number of potential indignities near death. If we can speak of death with dignity here, it will involve the *knowledge* that one is dying, that one can still *make decisions* about medical treatment as much as possible, that one can *stay connected with family and friends* throughout the dying process, and that one can *maintain one's personal and professional obligations and affairs* as well as *set one's house* in order before death. This ability to contemplate life's meaning

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in the face of death and to prepare for it is what separates us from dumb animals, which we put to sleep in the face of death. We treat animals "humanely" by doing so, but we treat persons "humanly" by *refusing* to do so.[9]

Even before end-of-life issues become a reality, living wills or directives should be prepared while a person is clear-thinking and can express her preferences about how much or how little medical technology should be used, what additional measures, if any at all, should be taken in the event of terminal illness and loss of sufficient cognizance.

Blessings and burdens. Serious talk of doing away with those who do not have a "useful life," who suffer greatly, or who are a "burden" to themselves, their families or society is a sure indication of moral decadence. This should serve as a warning sign of the demise of a civilization that no longer holds human life to be inviolable.

The late Christian statesman John Stott reflected on this idea of "being a burden":

> I sometimes hear old people, including Christian people who should know better, say, "I don't want to be a burden to anyone else. I'm happy to carry on living so long as I can look after myself, but as soon as I become a burden I would rather die." But this is wrong. We are all designed to be a burden to others. You are designed to be a burden to me and I am designed to be a burden to you. And the life of the family, including the life of the local church family, should be one of "mutual burdensomeness." "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2).[10]

Thus, Stott concluded, if the God of the universe himself became dependent—from total reliance on Mary as a baby to his outstretched arms hanging on a cross at the end of his ministry—then there is nothing undignified or demeaning about our depending on one another.

Medical Ethical Concerns

Jesus is "the great physician." Historically Christians have been on the forefront of medical care—founding Good Samaritan hospitals, giving generously to benevolent causes and pioneering in medical advances and in the advance of medicine worldwide. In fact, the bioethics movement in the early 1960s was inspired by Christians concerned for the sanctity of human

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life. As we noted, the "founding fathers" of bioethics, Daniel Callahan and Paul Ramsey, stated that it was *theological* resources that gave ethical shape to this emerging discipline. In a utilitarian-dominated society and with the discipline of bioethics becoming increasingly secularized, the Christian doctrine of the image of God and the moral fruitfulness of the biblical outlook should be articulated and defended in order to give bioethics much-needed grounding and guidance.

Today there has been an explosion of medical possibilities that present challenges, opportunities and dangers—eugenics, cloning, fetal experimentation. The term *bioethics* has been coined to reflect the broadening scope of medical ethics. It is more than the proper application of medical procedure to the patient. Issues of preventive medicine, the discovering and potential use of technologies, the allocating of resources, and other macroethical issues are also involved. The relationship between the medical practitioner and the scientist, politician and economist has, it seems, become more significant than that of the medical practitioner and the pastor. The church should be well-informed on these bioethical issues, speak wisely about them in our culture and not overlook the need for a compassionate, caring ministry toward individuals.

Guidelines. The Bible obviously does not speak directly to many of the issues raised by the discovery of new technologies. In biblical times "balms" (Jer 8:22), "oils" (Is 1:6; Lk 10:34; Jas 5:14) and "a little wine" (1 Tim 5:23) were prescribed for various maladies. Luke the evangelist was also a physician (Col 4:14). But medicine was rudimentary; so in facing today's complex world of medicine, biblical principles rather than mandates must be our focus. Medical ethics must be considered within the framework of several clear biblical principles:

1. God's love for people extends to their bodies, which he made. An aspect of God's desire for all to be saved (2 Pet 3:9) is God's desire that humans care for others, including physically.
2. God's ultimate purpose in Christ includes ending all sickness and suffering. He will do this through the bodily resurrection of believers and the restoration of creation.

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3. Human sickness and suffering are a result of the fall, the effects of which will be felt by all until Christ's return. It is both a judgment on sin (1 Cor 11:30) and a prod to deal with eternal matters before death. C. S. Lewis said that pain is God's "megaphone" to rouse a deaf world.
4. We are all dying and will eventually die. Divine intervention alone—not human ingenuity—can rescue human beings from death's consequences.
5. As Christ ministered to those who suffered because of sickness through understanding and direct intervention, so should the followers of Christ. Such Christlike ministry distinguishes between those who are his and those who merely profess to know him (Mt 25:31-46).
6. Sickness and suffering may result from the lack of care given by a preoccupied society (e.g., nakedness, hunger), from the natural and just consequences of immoral actions (e.g., imprisonment, drug addiction), or from no more than living in a sin-cursed world (e.g., death, harm or deprivation through earthquake or famine). In any event, it is always right to care for the sick and suffering with empathy and grace. Sickness and suffering will not always be overcome.
7. Though some are specifically gifted and called into a vocational medical ministry, all believers are responsible before God to care for sick (physically and mentally) believers and unbelievers alike. Care providers should be guided more by where the need is than by financial reward.
8. Caring for the sick is not an end in itself. It is evidence of a higher calling (the gospel) and of a greater solution (the restoration of all things). The worst humans can suffer is alienation from God. Ultimate liberation comes not from the eradication of disease or poverty, but from reconciliation with God.
9. Advances in medical science (as in all other branches of science), far from being unwarranted meddling in the affairs of God, can actually be to the glory of God. God calls us who bear his image to participate with him in creativity—what theologians call the "cultural mandate." This is not to justify the arrogance of a scientist who does not acknowledge

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God, or the sinfulness of those who use scientific advances for selfish or malicious purposes.

10. Christians should always pray for the sick, but never merely pray for the sick. We proposed earlier that even for the patient who is not given every life-sustaining procedure possible, care and support are essential—even when a cure is not possible.
11. Those with the gift of healing and the gift of faith can engage in a remarkable ministry to show forth the healing power of God in Christ's name. This important ministry is making a global impact and has been well-documented: "the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick" (Jas 5:15).[11]
12. Since medical resources are not unlimited, the allocation of such resources must take into account the value of all people as well as the necessity to prioritize the amount and kind of care for individuals. For example, expenditures and efforts for a liver transplant for an alcoholic should be less of a priority than for a newborn child with a poorly functioning liver.

We have already begun to address medical ethical issues pertaining to abortion and euthanasia, and we address more concerns below.

Artificial insemination. Artificial insemination is the act of depositing male semen by syringe or some other instrument into a woman's vaginal or cervical area rather than through sexual intercourse (coitus). In the Old Testament, there is the practice of not-so-artificial insemination by the brother of a deceased man who marries his widow to perpetuate his name (Deut 25:5-10)—a practice called "levirate marriage" (*levir* is Latin for "brother-in-law"). In this unique case, of course, not just any male could perform this "service."

In our day, artificial insemination is common—a somewhat routine expectation for infertile couples. This practice raises many ethical questions, however. Isn't artificial insemination legitimate—the assumption goes—if the goal is to produce children a couple can love and care for? But, some may object, doesn't artificial insemination violate the marriage bond? And what happens to unused embryos?

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Now, inseminating a wife with her husband's sperm—AIH (artificial insemination by the husband)—wouldn't qualify as adultery in any sense. But what about sperm from an outside party, or AID—artificial insemination by the donor? And a further question: Is there anything problematic with a surrogate mother, in whose womb a doctor implants a fertilized egg to carry a child to term for an infertile wife?

The Bible does not speak to these issues directly. Some might claim that the child seems more like a "product," while others would say that this is a corrective procedure, much like correcting bad vision through Lasik surgery. Although we do not find any direct Scripture to forbid artificial insemination, it nevertheless seems to stir deep psychological reactions in many people—and with good reason.

For one thing, given the capacities of modern technology, it is possible for a child to have up to *five* "parents": two *genetic* "parents" from whom the sperm and ovum come; the *surrogate* mother who carries the child to term; the two *rearing* parents (who need not be the same as the genetic parents). In considering this alone, we begin to see the moral and legal problems coming into view.

Further, medical procedures for insemination certainly do not unite as "one flesh" the two participants, and the deeper unity of spirit is absent altogether. Normally the donor is not even known to the recipient. While artificial insemination does not fall into the category of "adultery," most people testify of a certain moral hesitancy. Does this uneasiness about the procedure hint of a missing deeper level of unity—namely, the deep mystery of marital partnership in creating life? And it is an unreasonable guilt felt by the partner who "failed" in the creative process—a trauma many infertile couples have experienced. However, one can sympathize with a kind of "jealousy" of one partner over a child that derives from his mate though not from him; indeed, this may be a source of continuing unease.

Also, AID and surrogate motherhood wrongly presuppose a "right" to "possess" a child and to "find fulfillment" in having one. The tragic irony of the abortion industry (presently at 1.6 million per year) is that a tiny minority of couples go to often excruciating, costly lengths to conceive. Even so, there is a moral significance to biological parenthood, which brings

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with it a *historical* task of rearing, nurturing and civilizing the succeeding generation. Parenthood is not simply life-giving but love-giving; it is procreation, not simply reproduction.[12]

A further problem with artificial insemination is the depersonalization of the child. Sperm and egg become more like a commodity. A child's history is lost or diminished in the sterility of a sperm bank and an anonymous donor. Normal family life is upended by women who don't "need" men but want to have their own children; thus a child is automatically deprived of the equally important father figure in the home. In fact, studies have shown that the majority of children of anonymous sperm donors face personal identity issues. They can't answer common questions about their family background (ethnicity, history) and are often pained when their peers can. Many of them desire to know about and connect with the sperm donor's family, even insisting they have a right to know.[13]

As for surrogate motherhood specifically, simply consider the conflicts between Abraham, Sarah, Hagar and Ishmael in Genesis 16–17, 21. Also, surrogate motherhood leaves us wondering: *Who* is the mother? *Who* lays greater moral claim to the child—the "hiring" mother or the childbearing mother? Some might offer this counter-response: "But isn't adoption similar to surrogacy?" No, it is not. With adoption, the child isn't conceived *in order to be given up.* Rather, the child is on the scene, and his presence requires care. With surrogacy, by contrast, the child becomes an object and (if money is paid to the surrogate) a commodity. What makes this all the more difficult is the *maternal instinct* that is involved, which is intensified by the *gestation process,* which leads to emotional bonding and heightens the anticipation of birth. Giving up the child to the parents who "hired" the surrogate is often gut wrenching.[14]

Furthermore, a serious drawback to artificial insemination is that it typically involves the discarding of unused human embryos, which begin to deteriorate after about seven years. Some infertile couples have, rightly, attempted to rescue unborn humans involved in this misguided practice of embryo storage; this endeavor is called "embryo adoption," in which unused fertilized eggs are made available to infertile couples in hopes of possible future implantation.[15]

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If God is the one who opens the womb and shuts it (Gen 29–30; 1 Sam 1:5; Ps 127:3; Is 66:9), if children are his heritage, perhaps we should stand back and allow him to continue to play this role, trusting him to fulfill some higher purpose in withholding children. Alternatives include adoption and the wonderful surprise of late pregnancies. Also, in the providence of God, childless couples often have made very unique contributions to the kingdom of God because of the special resources available through their childless circumstances.

Since this is a contemporary issue not directly addressed in Scripture, we offer this analysis as our conviction about the implications of certain scriptural moral principles related to the issue.

Stem cell research. What are stem cells? These are the source of over two hundred kinds of tissue in the body. They have the quality of being "pluripotent"—the capacity to develop into different cell types: "When a stem cell divides, each new cell has the potential either to remain a stem cell or become another type of cell with a more specialized function, such as a muscle cell, a red blood cell, or a brain cell."[16] Various celebrities and politicians have advocated that *embryonic* stem cell research should be given ample government funding in the pursuit of curing diseases. There are ethical problems with embryonic stem cell research, however. Obtaining these cells—usually from unused embryos at fertility clinics—involves killing unborn humans, which is morally wrong.

By contrast, using *adult* stem cells is not morally problematic. (Nor is using the detached umbilical cord of a newborn baby.) These pluripotent cells are taken from places such as the placenta, upper nasal cavity, bone marrow or fat; they are then cultivated and injected back into the human body. Adult stem cell research is not only morally permissible; this avenue has proven *vastly* more fruitful than embryonic sources. It has helped cure or lessen the effects of diseases and physical problems such as spinal cord injuries, multiple sclerosis, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and blindness.[17] From a moral and practical point of view, adult stem cell research is the way to proceed.

Organ transplants and artificial organs. These seem to fall within the "creation mandate" involved in ruling with earth with God; this task of rec-

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tifying a problem in a human body is not "playing God." It is hard to see how this process can be ethically different from creating an artificial limb. Of course, there are many ethical questions involved, such as determining when the prospective donor is dead, but there can hardly be moral objections to the process itself.

"Improving" humans through genetics and technology. Futurist Ray Kurzweil has claimed that by the year 2045, a new species will evolve from the merging of humans and machines. University of Reading cybernetics professor Kevin Warwick has called himself the first "cyborg": he has had silicon microchips implanted in his body that send signals to a computer that tracks his movements on campus, opening doors and turning on lights for him. This combination of biology and technology, it is claimed, can enhance and expand limited human capacities to evolve into mentally, socially and medically improved "post humans." Will such endeavors enhance or enslave humans? What assumptions does such an endeavor make about human nature, about our problem and the solution to it? Do humans really need God? Are our fundamental problems spiritual and moral, or can we "save" ourselves through technology? Will such technology ultimately dehumanize and, as at Babel (Gen 11), further alienate us from God—and from our own selves?[18]

Or consider the breathtaking Human Genome Project—a three-billion-dollar, twenty-year international study, designed to identify the one hundred thousand genes located in human chromosomes. Our chromosomes are responsible for transmitting hereditary traits, and it turns out that more than fifteen hundred diseases have been identified as being genetically transmitted. "Gene therapy" has been shown effective in the prevention of cystic fibrosis, for example. So, can it be morally wrong to seek the elimination of these when it can be done without bad side effects?

Are there any boundaries beyond which we should not go? When it comes to genetic therapies, we can say that these should not be used to create "designer" babies with a certain eye, hair or skin color and genetic enhancements for athletes—all reminiscent of Nazi aspirations and creaturely hubris. Rather, such treatments of individuals should be *corrective* or *reparative,* where there is a significant departure from the way our bodies

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were designed to function. Such treatments of individual patients are called *somatic* ("body") cell therapy, and these are morally permissible as a *corrective* measure. In this case, the genetic change dies when the individual dies. By contrast, *germ* cell therapy is morally troubling. This therapy attempts to correct the genes to be passed on to *future* generations. This has ominous implications and limitless potential for harm.

The attempt to reshape the human genome or create "cyborgs" reminds us of Victor Frankenstein's creature in Mary Shelley's novel. We are limited intellectually, spiritually and morally to undertake such momentous pursuits. Ethicist Gilbert Meilaender writes: "When we take up the project of shaping future generations in so fundamental a way, we cannot really know what good or ill we may accomplish—we cannot, that is, really know what project we undertake. We may even wonder whether such a project . . . is really part of medicine. For the 'patient' is no longer any particular suffering human being, but humankind."[19] This tempting project would *shape humanity* in a fundamental way. Though this may be well-motivated in part, we should exercise our God-given freedom by humbly saying no to making humankind itself our patient. The specter of Huxley's *Brave New World* has never been so present as it is now in the biological manipulation of humanity. Genes—and technology—have a shaping effect on human identity. How can it be right to orchestrate the "evolution of humanity" to create a super race through government control? C. S. Lewis feared experimental genetics more than nuclear destruction because of its potential to threaten the identity of humanity itself—the rule of a few hundred humans over billions of others. "Each new power won *by* man is a power *over* man as well. Each advance leaves him weaker as well as stronger. In every victory, besides being the general who triumphs, he is also the prisoner who follows the triumphal car."[20]

We confess a deep hesitancy, not to say revulsion, about the use of psychosurgery, mind-altering drugs and technologies, and the cloning of a whole individual. Humility, restraint and resistance are called for in the face of such fearful capabilities and human finitude. The far greater dangers lie with the *morally* and *spiritually* handicapped than with the *genetically* handicapped.[21]

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Plastic surgery. Humans look at the outward appearance while God looks at the heart (1 Sam 16:7). This is aptly illustrated in our youth culture's fixation with cosmetic surgery. While corrective procedures for physical abnormalities (e.g., cleft palates/lip) are appropriate, cosmetic surgeries (facelifts, breast augmentation, liposuction) raise fundamental moral and spiritual questions. We are *not* saying that cosmetic surgery is inherently immoral. Being well-groomed and well-dressed, wearing braces for straightening teeth, or putting on makeup to improve one's appearance is not itself problematic. When God entered into a covenant with Israel at Sinai, he said he adorned his bride with rings, ornaments and fine clothing—and Israel grew beautiful (Ezek 16:10-14; cf. Is 61:10). The problem was that Israel trusted in her beauty (Ezek 16:15).

Likewise, many trust in cosmetic surgery as a means to elevate self-esteem; they embrace the myth that physical appearance determines psychological well-being. Ironically, patients having undergone cosmetic surgery are *more likely* to become depressed after surgery.[22] Fundamental questions are: What are the motivations for pursuing such "enhancements"? Are we more preoccupied with improving our bodies than disciplining ourselves for the purpose of godliness (1 Tim 4:7) and cultivating the inner person (1 Pet 3:4)? After all, "charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting"—but not devotion to God (Prov 31:30 NIV). The obsession for surgical beautifications and improvements is what the pagans pursue. Disciples must seek first God's kingdom (Mt 6:32-33).

Miscellaneous Life Issues

Negligence. Not all *legally* liable negligence is *moral* negligence, and very little that constitutes moral culpability has been legislated against. For example, an automobile defect or medical malpractice that is unintentional could well be subject to civil prosecution but not be sinful negligence from a biblical point of view. If adequate precautions were not taken, the moral element is introduced. For example, extensive correspondence by leading asbestos manufacturers indicates that they knew very well the hazardous nature of the manufacture and use of the product, but deliberately decided to continue manufacture. Since the results are not fully manifest for several

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decades, the general public was not aware of this negligence, which was certainly a moral failure.

As another example, a student told me (Robertson) of a part-time job on which he was required to use hazardous chemicals. When state inspection time came, the chemicals were hidden and the inspection passed. He and others continued in the employment of such an unscrupulous employer because of economic necessity.

On the other hand, there are matters of negligence about which governments do not ordinarily make laws. In Matthew 25, where the final judgment is previewed, we are taught that neglecting Jesus' disciples in need of food, clothing and care—"the least of these brothers of mine" (Mt 25:40 NIV; cf. Mt 12:48-9)—is subject to the most severe judgment. We could add that, since 80 percent of religious persecution today is against Christians, fellow believers have a special obligation to be praying, materially assisting, raising awareness and exerting social and legal pressure to bring such practices to an end.[23] More generally, to respond to natural disaster that threatens the life or health of people is the responsibility of believers to the extent of their ability (Prov 14:31). At least, to ignore human problems that I could help is moral negligence, even though I may never be prosecuted in a human court.

The potential for failure in negligence is virtually limitless. For this reason, we are called on to be sensitive, compassionate people of integrity, recognizing our own great limitations in wisdom and resources to meet human need, and pleading the grace of God to cover our shortcomings.

Animal "rights." Do animals have rights? Better questions seem to be, what is God's purpose for animals? How does God expect human beings to "rule over" (Gen 1:26) animals?

Remember, animals and human beings share a similar "life" (Gen 1:30; 2:7). But there are significant differences. It is precisely because humans are made in God's image that they have intrinsic dignity and rights—unlike animals. This personhood confers on us a certain "moral shield." Human beings have authority over animals. God instructed human beings to name, to superintend (Gen 1:26-28) and to care for animals (Gen 2:15; 4:2). Humans have the inherent capacity to relate to God; to exert free will;

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to act morally; to relate deeply; to be self-reflective, conscious and rational; and to experience life beyond death. While animals may be *conscious* (aware), humans are *self-conscious*; we are aware that we are aware and can reflect on our own thoughts and actions, which enables us to think and act morally.

Even so, abusing or wantonly slaughtering animals is wrong (Prov 12:10; cf. Ex 23:5; Deut 5:14; 22:6-7); this is not because animals have inherent rights, but because such actions are an *abuse* of our God-given human stewardship, of our responsibility to care for creation. It would be wrong to raze a forest of majestic redwoods or sequoias, not because trees have rights, but because humans would be misusing their power and would have violated the Creator's trust.

If we claim unlimited rights over animals merely because we have power over them, we are functional Darwinists, modeling a survival-of-the-fittest paradigm. If we claim unlimited control of animals using Genesis 1:28 as divine cover for our own fallen purposes, we do no better. As divine image bearers, we are co-rulers with God over creation. God providentially cares for his creation, and we have a mandate to join him in this care.

There is some debate about the status of animals before the fall. According to some, Genesis 1:29-30 suggests wholesale vegetarianism before the fall. However, the text does not require this ("I have given *every* green plant for food"—not "*only* green plants for food"), and this text suggests God's general provision for humans and animals from an abundant earth. Furthermore, though not mentioned in Genesis, God apparently established a "food chain" at creation. In Psalm 104, a creation psalm, the "lions roar for their prey and seek their food from God" (Ps 104:21 NIV). These animals also die: "When you hide your face, they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust" (Ps 104:29 NIV). In the book of Job, God refers to his creation, which involves predatory activity. Job 38:39-40 speaks of the prey of the lion and of lions crouching in wait in a thicket. The hawk spies out prey from the rocky crags (Job 39:28-29), and its nestlings eat the blood of it: "where the slain are, there is he." God also created the "fierce" Leviathan—probably the crocodile—with "fearsome teeth" (41:1, 10, 14). This food chain does not seem to be a post-fall situation,

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and it is actually called "good" (Ps 104:27-28). The point of Romans 5:12 is that *human* death—not animal (or plant) death—came at the fall.

Even texts that speak of the new heavens and new earth, where lamb and lion will peacefully coexist, are difficult to interpret. They don't necessarily imply an exact replica of the Garden in Eden. After all, such texts mention that a youth will die at one hundred years of age (Is 65:2). Pictures of a wolf grazing with the lamb or a lion eating straw like an ox simply mean that once dangerous animals will be domesticated ("eat straw")—not that lions will have a ruminant's teeth and digestive tract! After all, we read that *no* lion will be there in God's peaceable kingdom (Is 35:9).

Jesus was not a vegetarian. He himself would eat lamb at each Passover, and he ate fish (Lk 24:42; cf. Mk 6:33-44; 8:1-9; Jn 21:9, 13). The Old Testament commanded the death of animals to anticipate the death of Christ, and throughout Scripture we observe that animals can be used to serve human ends as humans serve God's ends (e.g., Lk 19:29-35). For example, even though animals don't have rights, they still could bring comfort or some level of companionship to the elderly or unmarried. Dancing bears in the circus and playful otters in a zoo can entertain and delight. As the BBC *Planet Earth* breathtaking video series and John Stott's delightful book *The Birds Our Teachers* illustrate, the wonders of the animal kingdom—animals God created for his pleasure—can inspire a sense of awe for, and praise to, the God of all creation.

As could be expected, the Bible does not address the question of animal experimentation. Since there is no essential difference between consuming animals to feed human life and consuming animals to promote the health of human life, we do not see a biblical prohibition of it. Nevertheless, experimentation should never be trivial or unnecessary. As there is no biblical prohibition against animal experimentation, neither do we see a requirement for it. Similarly, any Christian who refuses to wear leather or fur should be free to refrain. But this prohibition cannot be placed on others as the biblical mandate. The early church's dispute over meat offered to idols is somewhat similar to the question of eating meat today. Paul says, "Let every one be fully convinced in his own mind" (Rom 14:5 RSV), and "Everything is indeed clean" (Rom 14:20 RSV).

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24

War and Peace

Time magazine noted that in the last thirty-five centuries of recorded history, only one out of fifteen years has been without war.[1] In the 5,560 years of recorded human history there have been 14,531 wars, for an average of 2.6 a year. Of 185 generations only 10 have known unsullied peace. While some say we're less violent now, others disagree "Since 1900 almost 100 million men have died in 100 wars—compared with 3,845,000 in the 19th century."

Is war an unmitigated moral evil, the ultimate expression of human sinfulness? Or is war sometimes just and necessary, and nonintervention or nonresistance a moral evil? Or is war always wrong, though sometimes the lesser of two evils? Those who take the Bible seriously and see war and violence as the evil result of our fallenness have a wide range of viewpoints. Let us consider them under two broad categories: "nonresistance" and "justifiable force."

Nonresistance

There are several varieties of nonresistance, or pacifism. The secular humanitarian and the liberal churchman hold that war is immoral because of ethical principles derived in part, perhaps, from Scripture, but primarily from philosophical reasoning. Among the various biblically based peace churches there are two main lines of approach. There are those who hold that it is wrong for the Christian to participate in war because war is intrinsically wrong; and others hold that nonparticipation is part of the Christian's special vocation as an elite spiritual "priesthood" and "aristocracy," but that some war by the secular state prosecuted by unbelievers is justifiable.

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Some historical considerations. Scholars such as historian Roland Bainton and theologian John Howard Yoder have maintained that the church was uniformly nonmilitary ("pacifistic") from the second century till the rise of Constantine (A.D. 312), citing church fathers Tertullian (160–225) and Origen (c. 185–254). They claim that the early church refused any part in political power or the military violence of the Caesars' wars.[2]

The evidence for this is not so tidy. For one thing, the New Testament itself is not nonmilitaristic. It often speaks favorably of soldiers and centurions, including their piety, conversions and baptisms (Mt 8:5-13; 27:54; Lk 3:14; Acts 10–11; 23:16-22). Jesus himself used force to drive out money-changers from the temple (e.g., Jn 2:14-15). Stephen and Paul matter-of-factly endorsed the dispossession of the Canaanites (Acts 7:11; 13:19). Paul taught that the God-ordained minister of the state bears a sword and has a divine duty to punish evildoers (Rom 13:4). And the author of Hebrews commended those who "conquered kingdoms," "became mighty in war," "put foreign armies to flight" (Heb 11:33-34).

After the New Testament and up to the mid-second century, we have silence on Christian soldiers. But just after this time, we have clear evidence of Christian soldiers in the Roman army. The Christian historian Eusebius records that when emperor Marcus Aurelius was fighting the Germans and Sarmatians, his troops had no water; so Christian soldiers knelt down and prayed, and water came from the heavens to refresh them. We also have tomb inscriptions of Christian soldiers before Constantine, and St. Sebastian and many other Christians served in the army under emperor Diocletian (early fourth century). We have evidence of Christians fighting in Syria a whole century prior to Constantine and in Armenia just before the rise of Constantine.

Furthermore, the nonmilitaristic perspective of several church fathers does not necessarily represent a uniformly held, empire-wide Christian belief during this time. In fact, we have indications in Tertullian's own writings that there were Christians everywhere—in "fortresses" (*castella*) and in the "military camp" (*castra*). Tertullian appears to shift from a more tolerant attitude toward the military as more and more Christians were making military life into a career. And Origen argues that Christians can

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better fight for the emperor through prayers than with weapons; this suggests the possibility of a just war.

Beyond this, questions remain: If early Christians did reject fighting *for Caesar*, did this imply a rejection of *any* possible military involvement whatsoever? Or was fighting for Caesar different than fighting to stop, say, Nazi aggression? And could the fact that the Caesars at particular times or places required idolatrous practices of soldiers be a major reason for Christians abstaining from military service? And, as Rome had no police force, many soldiers served in police-like functions, keeping order within the calmer empire—unlike the more fierce fighting at the borders. At any rate, early Christian military involvement didn't require assistance from Constantine.[3]

After the rise of Constantine (see further comments on Constantine in chapter twenty-nine), Ambrose of Milan (340–396) and then his disciple Augustine (345–430) would advocate principles for a just war (see below)—a view that held sway until the twentieth century. In the wake of the Reformation, Anabaptists took a nonresistance position. Even so, the Anabaptist *Schleitheim Confession* (article 6) affirms that the sword in the hands of government is "ordained of God outside the perfection of Christ" and "punishes and puts to death the wicked, and guards and protects the good." The sword is "ordained to be used by the worldly magistrates." Contrary to many Christian pacifists in this tradition, this confession observes that not all worldly power is inherently evil. More than nonresistance, the foundational doctrine was total noninvolvement in the citizenships of this world.

Pacifism gradually emerged with clarity as a central doctrine for many Anabaptists, even where persecution was no longer an issue. The early church, on the other hand, quickly gave up the noninvolvement stance when persecution ceased and Christians were accepted by the establishment.

In the twentieth century, many liberal Protestants became ardent pacifists—not from the force of biblical teaching, but from an optimistic view of human goodness and the perfectibility of society. After the horrors of World War I, many Western intellectuals and other influencers endorsed pacifism and spoke of the folly of war for *any* side. Books such as Hemmingway's *Farewell to Arms* and Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* became bestsellers. Pacifism dominated France, for example,

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which had lost over 1.3 million of its men in the "war to end all wars." War came to be viewed as inherently *evil* as well as tragic and pointless—without heroes and villains. France's pacifism—not to mention Britain's mistaken hope for "peace in our time"—was not lost on the observant Hitler, who would invade and overpower France in eight weeks, and he assumed that Britain would similarly lack the will to defend itself.[4]

This pacifism went into retreat during World War II and reemerged with a different rationale on the gradual realization of what nuclear warfare would mean. In this latter era, many Roman Catholic leaders also entered the ranks of selective (nuclear) or full pacifism. More recent scholarship in this tradition has included John Howard Yoder, Richard Hays, Stanley Hauerwas and Greg Boyd.[5]

The example of Christ. The nonviolent resistance view is founded on the teaching and example of Jesus Christ. Some pacifists believe that Christ's teaching about "turning the other cheek" and not resisting one that is evil (Mt 5:38-42) applies to nations as well as to individuals. Other pacifists hold that this teaching applies only to believers. Love must not harm—kill, for example—but turn the other cheek no matter what others do. Would Jesus throw a grenade or take up a gun? What of the role of local police to protect innocent citizens from criminals? And during a home invasion, should believers protect themselves and their dependents from being raped, murdered or kidnapped? Won't a predominantly pacifistic nation be vulnerable to thugs and tyrants?

Those advocating nonviolent resistance and "just peacemaking" root their view in texts emphasizing that Christ's kingdom is "not of this world" (Jn 18:36) and that we don't fight with worldly weapons (2 Cor 10:4). Rather, we should love and pray for our enemies (Mt 5:44) and overcome evil with good (Rom 12:21). Can we fight against those we are called to love? Many pacifists consider *any* use of force immoral, and they point to Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. as examples of courageous nonviolent resistance that resulted in lasting change. Gandhi asked whether there was any difference in fighting for liberty and democracy or for totalitarianism when both leave behind the dead, the orphan and the homeless. Christians should take the stance of a "presumption against war."

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Just War Theory

Just war theorists attempt to deal realistically with unpreventable violent aggression against the vulnerable, and just war principles carry over to service in a *police* force. Just war theory recognizes the justice of protecting innocent nations from thugs, bullies and tyrants. It recognizes that attempts at negotiation and peacemaking with ruthless tyrants will often be fruitless (e.g., the Munich Agreement of 1938). Against Gandhi, it does make a difference to fight so that future generations might have greater opportunity, freedom, security and protection of rights. Military historian Victor Davis Hanson reminds us that war or military strength has helped bring an end to chattel slavery in America, Nazism, Fascism and Soviet Communism. More often than not, wars break out not because of failure of communication or misunderstanding—or from poverty or inequality. Rather, they begin from malicious intent and the absence of deterrence—or because of lack of clear resolution or unresolved disagreements from an earlier war. Often nations become accomplices to evil through inaction.[6] On the fall side of Christ's second coming, war will be with us.

Augustine created the first great synthesis of Christian faith and the practice of war. He argued for the necessity of just wars. With rare exceptions Augustine's defense of war—later followed by Thomas Aquinas and Hugo Grotius—became the standard position of all major branches of the church from that day to this. Augustine argued that any justifiable war must have peace as its goal. Just as God must judge and punish creatures he loves, just war should be inspired not by hatred but by love for justice and peace and by concern for the oppressed. The issue is not violence versus nonviolence, but just versus unjust uses of force. So, rather than a "presumption against war," our view advocates the presumption of *justice,* which *may* or *may not* call for war.

There are seven stable and standard just war criteria, although they should not be weighted equally. The first three take priority whereas the last four are more prudential and should not outmaneuver the first three.[7]

1. *Just Cause.* All unprovoked aggression is condemned. A war for self-defense and protection (including defense of other vulnerable nations)

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is morally legitimate. Following this first criterion alone would eliminate all war and aggression.

2. *Just Intent.* The only legitimate intention is to secure a just or fair peace for friend and foe alike, ruling out revenge, conquest, economic gain or ideological supremacy.
3. *Lawful Declaration.* Since the use of military force is the prerogative of governments—not of private individuals or parties within the state—a state of war must be officially declared by a lawful government.
4. *Last Resort.* War may be entered into only when reasonable negotiations and compromise have been tried and have failed. This does not mean gross injustices continue alongside endless negotiations. Last resort is a prudential, secondary consideration, as are the remaining criteria.
5. *Limited Objectives.* As the goal of a just war is *peace,* war should not be committed to the destruction of another nation's economy or its political institutions.
6. *Limited/proportionate means.* The weaponry and the force used should be limited to what is needed to repel the aggression and deter future attacks—that is to say, to secure a just peace.
7. *Noncombatant immunity.* Since war is an official act of government, only those who are officially agents of government may fight, and individuals not actively contributing to the conflict (including POWs, medical personnel and casualties, as well as civilian nonparticipants) should be immune from attack—unless in cases of supreme emergency, as noted above.

Some just war theorists will include a preemptive first strike if overriding evidence shows that an unjust attack is pending—such as Israel's attempting to protect itself in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. Most contemporary Christian advocates of the just war position reject the legitimacy of revolutions, crusades[8] and wars of liberation, even if fought in the name of ethical principles rather than aggression or greed. These would be uncontrollable and unjustifiable causes.

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To all of this, the pacifist replies that neither the teaching and example of Christ nor the evidence of history permit us to believe that any war is justifiable. So let us turn to the biblical and theological data.

War and Peace in Biblical Perspective

War in the Old Testament. When war and peace are evaluated in the light of Scripture, it is important to distinguish between Old Testament and New Testament teaching. In the Old Testament, God's people constituted a nation gathered out from among the rest of the nations, whereas in the New Testament God's people constituted a spiritual kingdom dispersed among the peoples of the world. For this reason, the commands concerning war for the people of God in the Old Testament and the people of God in the New Testament are different. In the Old Testament war was not only sanctioned or permitted in cases of self-defense (e.g., Ex 17; Num 21), but was actually commanded by God.[9]

Now, we should note that several general passages do seem to suggest a just war theme. Perhaps "time for war" (Eccles 3:8) does so. And what of the more general wisdom of Proverbs, which urges one to "make war by wise guidance" (Prov 20:18) and states "For by wise guidance you will wage war, and in abundance of counselors there is victory" (Prov 24:6)? Perhaps Jesus has such texts in mind when he refers to a king counting the cost before going to war (Lk 14:31-32).

Although we cannot enter into a full discussion here,[10] there are particular reasons war was sanctioned in the Old Testament at a particular (early) stage in Israel's history. These commands are *unique* and *unrepeatable,* and they were repeatedly *accompanied by miraculous signs* such as the exodus from Egypt or the parting of the Jordan as a clear sign of divine validation—which even the Canaanites recognized (Josh 2:8-11; 5:1; cf. 1 Sam 4:7-8).

1. Even divine judgment is included in God's saving purposes, even for the Canaanites (Ps 83:16-18), and God brings temporal judgment both to Israel and the rest of the nations—whether directly or indirectly—with a *heavy, reluctant heart;* he does not delight in judgment (Gen 6:6; Lam 3:33).

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2. The enemies of Israel were God's enemies as well (Ps 139:19-22). However, it was not that Israel could do no wrong, since they were stubborn and rebellious (Deut 9:6). Indeed, God warned that Israel would be vomited out of the land as well (Lev 18:28). In fact, they were—with the northern kingdom of Israel being overtaken by the Assyrians (722 B.C.) and Judah being ravaged by the Babylonians (587/586 B.C.).
3. War as a means of judgment against Canaanite religion and morality was a last resort—an emergency measure—to stem the tide of spiritual and moral decay. God had waited over four hundred years before Canaanite sin had reached its limit (Gen 15:16)—sin of infant sacrifice, bestiality, incest, homosexuality. Simultaneous with judgment was the necessity of creating a cultural and spiritual environment for the coming of a Redeemer—a faithful Israelite who would fulfill the Abrahamic promise to bring blessing to all the nations (Gen 12:1-3).
4. The Canaanites' situation posed a life-and-death struggle for Israel's own national identity. To capitulate to the Canaanite influence would have been tantamount to treason for Israel—much like John Walker Lindh's leaving America to join the Taliban to fight against American soldiers in Afghanistan. Idolatry and immorality were very real threats to Israel's identity and calling to bring light to the nations. In Israel's day, a threat against the state was a threat against religion—and vice versa. But whether in Israel or in today's nation-states, a common feature is the reality of shaping a coherent or cohesive society around a common primary loyalty: "Each demands that primary loyalty and threatens with destruction any who prove disloyal to the disadvantage to the rest of the society."[11]
5. The chief object of destruction was not Canaanites per se, but rather false worship (idols, altars, shrines) as well as a repudiation of covenants and marriages with idolatrous peoples who would spiritually and morally lead Israel astray (Deut 7:3-6).
6. The people against whom war was made had time to repent, having heard of God's delivering Israel from Egypt (Josh 2:10-11; cf.

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1 Sam 4:8). Some, such as Rahab and the Shechemites (Josh 2; 8:33-35), did so.

7. The main emphasis of God's commands—and the first directive—was for Israel's enemies to be displaced—"dispossessed" or "driven out"—not wiped out (e.g., Ex 23:27-33). Driving out the Canaanites, whose deities were tied to the land, would reveal the superiority of Yahweh over these false gods. Driving out—like Adam and Eve were "driven out" of the garden (Gen 3:24)—suggests displacement, not death.[12]

8. The language of "utterly destroy" or "leave alive nothing that breathes" was typically *hyperbolic* or *exaggerated* in ancient Near Eastern war texts. Even a narrow victory could be "utter destruction." King Mesha of Moab claimed that "Israel is no more"—quite an overstatement! In places where Joshua "utterly destroyed" Canaanites, we continue to see that many Canaanites remained in the land (Judg 1–2; cf. Josh 23:7, 12). We read of "utter destruction"—and then of many survivors! For example, the Anakites are "utterly destroyed" (Josh 11:21-22), and then Caleb goes to fight against them in the hill country (Josh 14:12-15). Egyptologist Kenneth Kitchen points out that the Israelite attacks on cities were merely disabling raids—not acts of utter decimation. They would attack towns and then head back to their base camp at Gilgal. Kitchen concludes: "These campaigns . . . were not territorial conquests with instant Hebrew occupation. The text is very clear about this."[13] Also, Judges 1–2, alongside abundant archaeological evidence, suggests that the Israelites *gradually infiltrated* Canaan rather than depending on an overwhelming military blitzkrieg.

What of other peoples who were "utterly destroyed"? With the Midianites, Numbers 31:7 (NIV) states that after Midian's seduction of Israel, Israel "fought against Midian . . . and killed every man." But this cannot be literal since in Judges 6:5 (NIV), the Midianites are "like swarms of locusts. It was impossible to count them or their camels." With the Amalekites, though the text says Saul *had* "utterly destroyed" the Amalekites, though their king (Agag) and animals were preserved (1 Sam 15:8, 20). As the story goes on, we see plenty of Amalekites

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who remained. They continued to fight Israel, and over four hundred Amalekites escaped (1 Sam 27:8-9; 30:1-17). Unlike the Canaanites and Midianites, generation after generation of Amalekites sought Israel's destruction. They were more like Japanese kamikazes or the Nazis.

The same "utterly destroy" language is applied to Judah: God himself said he would "utterly destroy" Judah and make them an "everlasting ruin" through the invading Babylonian army (Jer 25:9), but this was clearly hyperbolic, as we see at the end of the book of Jeremiah. What we do see is that Judah's religious, military, political, and economic structures are disabled. *Virtually every time* a narration of "utter destruction" occurs, it is followed by an account that presupposes it did not happen.

9. Joshua carried out "all that Moses commanded" (Josh 11:12, 14-15, 20; etc.). But large numbers of Canaanites still lived in the land. Thus Moses' command in Deuteronomy 20 to "utterly destroy" should also be understood as exaggerated or hyperbolic language.

10. Judgment for sin *always* comes, in some cases sooner than others. The death of all people is part of this judgment. God uses various instruments in this judgment, and in the Old Testament he used the nation of Israel or other nations (e.g., Is 10).

11. The New Testament—including Jesus himself—affirms the workings of "the God of the Old Testament." This God brought just judgment (Mt 11:21-24; 24:37-39; Acts 7:11; 13:9; 1 Cor 10; Heb 11:33-34). Further, Jesus *continues* this theme by threatening judgment for Israel and others (Mt 18:6; 21:41; Mk 12:9; Rev 2:16, 21-23). What is more, Jesus and New Testament writers go *beyond* the Old Testament with their repeated emphasis on permanent, post-mortem separation from God for those who reject him (e.g., Mt 8:12; 2 Thess 1:9; Rev 14:11).

12. We do not really understand the *holiness* and thus the *wrath* of God. God hates sin, and he judges people who defy him and exclude themselves from his presence and resist his Spirit (Acts 7:51; 2 Thess 1:9). Failure to understand God's justice and anger at sin will mean failure to understand the depths of God's love in providing redemption.

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13. If innocent life was lost in these "Yahweh wars," it was because a good, wise God had overriding reasons to bring about a greater good in this supreme emergency—as when innocent lives would be lost if the president ordered a terrorist-hijacked plane to be shot out of the sky.

God is called a God of war, the Lord of (military) hosts. Though theological systems may differ on the unity of Old and New Testaments, no one can dispute that not only were certain wars sanctioned in the Old Testament, but the "final war" of judgment against the world system, according to Revelation, will be waged by God/Christ himself. Thus it cannot be said on biblical authority that waging war is always immoral. The only debate is whether human-initiated violence is ever justifiable in this church age.

War and the use of force in the New Testament. Those who hold to a position of nonresistance often ask, what would Jesus do? Though Jesus is our supreme example, not every activity of his becomes a mandate for his followers. His special mission was to die for the world's sins; to do otherwise would be capitulation to Satan. By contrast, our vocation is distinct, even though we are to live lives "conformed to his death." Even when we are called on to lay down our life for others, some might be called to accept martyrdom for Christ's sake, and others to die valiantly defending the life of another. In any event, Jesus' example cannot be a rationale for nonresistance under all circumstances.

For one thing, the argument that Jesus prohibited the use of force begs the question—or assumes the point it wants to prove—namely, that a slap on the cheek must be an act of violence. Actually, the back-handed slap is a gross insult, as we'll see below. Also, for those keen on asking the "what would Jesus do?" question, we can raise this one: "Would Jesus make a whip and drive moneychangers from the temple—and stop people from entering the temple?" Indeed, Jesus used force in driving moneychangers from the temple and (forcibly?) stopping merchants from entering the temple. And he likely did this twice, not just once (Mk 11:15-17; Jn 2:14-15).[14] Furthermore, in his parable of the vineyard, Jesus says that the vineyard owner will "come and destroy the vine-growers, and will give the vineyard to others" (Mk 12:9)—or to use the words of his perceptive audience, "he will bring those wretches to a wretched end" (Mt 21:41). He

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threatens judgment on Bethsaida, Chorazin and Capernaum (Mt 11:21-24), which would take place in A.D. 70. And he pronounced it on the false prophetess "Jezebel" and on the Nicolaitans (Rev 2:16, 21-23). We see Jesus himself coming at the end of history—John uses the imagery of a military conqueror on a white horse (Rev 19:11)—to bring final judgment to the world. And what about others in the New Testament who affirm the use of force in certain instances? Stephen, Paul and the author of Hebrews affirm and commend Israel for fighting in their divinely commissioned battles (Acts 7:11; 13:9; Heb 11:33-34).

Jesus' command to "turn the other cheek" does not refer to an act of violence, contrary to what Christian pacifists typically presume. Assuming that the one striking is right-handed, the blow would be a back-handed slap—a gross insult (cf. Lam 3:30, which refers to a simple slap without indicating the back of the hand: "Let him give his cheek to the smiter and be filled with insults" [RSV]). And when Jesus was slapped while on trial, he did not "turn the other cheek" but challenged this (Jn 18:23). So we should be careful about absolutizing the "turn the other cheek" command. This is true of the command to "give to everyone who asks you" (e.g., we shouldn't give when an alcoholic approaches and asks us for money to buy beer). Even the command to forgive is not absolute (Lk 17:3-4: "if he repents, forgive him"). Also, when the Eleven are seeking a replacement for the treacherous Judas, they cite two imprecatory psalms as their justification: "let his homestead be made desolate, and let no one dwell in it" and "let another man take his office" (Ps 69:25 and 109:8 in Acts 1:20). Paul calls Elymas "you son of the devil" (Acts 13:10). John refers to false prophets as "the children of the devil" (1 Jn 3:10). Paul is confident that Alexander, who brought Paul much harm, will be justly repaid for it (2 Tim 4:14). Martyred saints in Revelation cry out, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" (Rev 6:10). These saints recognized that justice cannot be ignored, and they called on God to set matters right. Likewise, Jesus does not always demand that we literally "turn the other cheek." Rather, Jesus actually prohibits returning insult for insult, commanding rather to take additional personal insults.

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What about not resisting evil? Actually, Jesus himself is constantly resisting evil. The command is better translated "do not resist by evil means"—which is precisely how other New Testament passages interpret Jesus' words (Rom 12:17-21; 1 Pet 2:21-24). In Acts 23, Paul appeals to his rights as a Roman citizen to be protected from those plotting to take his life. So Paul gets the protection of two hundred spearmen and seventy horsemen, who will use force if necessary—precisely what Paul was hoping they would do. This is exactly the role government should have in bearing the "sword"—to protect the defenseless and to punish or take "vengeance" on evildoers (Rom 13:4). No individual should take personal "vengeance" but leave room for God's "wrath" (Rom 12:19). A few verses later, Paul says this should be left to the state—the "avenger" of evil to bring "wrath" on evildoers (Rom 13:4). Although some pacifists will downplay the word "sword" (*machaira*)—a simple short sword—it is clearly a *lethal instrument* (cf. Acts 12:2; Heb 11:37; Rev 13:10). This same word can be used of a sword of larger size—a "*great* sword"—like the one given to the rider of the red horse, symbolizing death and bloodshed (Rev 6:4). Some will argue that the "sword" in Romans 13 is what tax gatherers carried about with them—and that Paul was admonishing believers not to rebel against Rome's demand for taxes. However, the language of "avenge" and "bring wrath" in Romans 13 is not the language of tax gathering—but something more severe.

The New Testament, in addressing the issue of war and peace, does not go beyond the principle of governmental authority, which includes the legitimate use of force. As we noted, soldiers and centurions are treated favorably in the New Testament—indeed, one who has more faith than any Israelite (Mt 8:10; Acts 10:1-2). Military men coming for baptism are told to be fair in their dealings and content with their wages (Lk 3:14). They were not told, "Go and sin no more"; yet if military service were inherently immoral, this is exactly what we would expect. Would Christ have instructed a prostitute simply not to charge too much? And when the disciples mention that they have "two swords"—to which Jesus replies, "It is enough" (Lk 22:38)—the reader is left wondering, "Why were they carrying swords in the first place?"

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Furthermore, if the hermeneutical principle of the unity of Scripture is applied, Christ's teaching concerning personal sacrificial love fits with all the rest of biblical teaching and his own example, while Paul's and Peter's teaching on human governmental authority also fits with the rest of biblical teaching and God's own example. The two principles are not in conflict. So we have in the New Testament the combined affirmation of government authority and force and the lack of condemnation of those exercising that authority with force.

We see the qualities of love and justice in governing illustrated in the presidential career of Abraham Lincoln. Presidential historian Doris Kearns Goodwin's book *Team of Rivals* documents the remarkably wise, virtuous, courageous and magnanimous character of this president.[15] Though he used force to preserve the Union and put down rebellion, he exhibited Christlike humility and graciousness toward his opponents, forgave and restored enemies rather than trying to humiliate them. This spirit is expressed in his Second Inaugural Address.

> With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.

Lincoln's public and personal life was marked by integrity. He grew in his Christian faith during his presidency.[16] He very much exemplified the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus' own mission statement in Luke 4. He did not initiate war, and he always held out an olive branch to his enemies (he sought to go and first be reconciled to them). He did not seek to crush or humiliate his opponents (he loved his enemies and prayed for them). He did not return insult for insult in order to maintain his honor (he turned the other cheek). He was honest in his dealings (his yes was yes and his no no). He was modest about his accomplishments (he did not attempt to display his righteousness before others). He recognized that he was accountable to God (he was seeking God's kingdom first). He sought to protect American citizens from harm and worked to free slaves (proclaiming release to the captives).[17]

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Though the data of the New Testament on the issue of the Christian's participation in war is not direct or abundant, the basic principles are clear: to be Godlike is to make a sacrificial, loving response to maintain a nonvindictive, magnanimous, reconciling attitude in all personal relationships when one's own rights or honor are at stake; and human government is responsible, with accountability to God, to use force when necessary to assure peace and protection for its citizenry.

Other areas of concern. Based on this foundation, what theology of war and peace can be inferred from other biblical principles? Consider three areas of concern: values, God's sovereignty and human responsibility.

Values. Here we point out certain tensions that seem to lean more toward a "just war" position, but we realize that this issue of values is very complex.

1. *War versus peace:* Peace is preferable to war, ordinarily. God is on the side of peace, ordinarily. We know this because peace will be the final state of those who have made peace with God. So, "blessed are the peacemakers." Always. But sometimes war may be the only route to righteous peace and to protecting the defenseless. If a war is just and thus waged in the will of God, it is a moral necessity—not a "necessary evil"—even if it involves death and sorrow. We should not pit "just peacemaking" against "just war." Sometimes they may work in tandem. A just war may be necessary to proceed toward peacemaking (e.g., with Germany and Japan after World War II).

2. *Justice versus love:* These are not at odds. True love is tough, and true justice is tempered with mercy. Punishment can be a true expression of love, both for the persons needing protection and, it is hoped, for the person receiving it as well. It is just and loving to protect your wife or daughter or even a stranger on the street from being raped or kidnapped. Protecting the defenseless has strong biblical warrant.

   Of course, Christians are not to use force to extend Christ's kingdom (Jn 18:36); that is not the church's task. As we have seen, the Christian ethic of love is not opposed to that of justice; love and justice will at times require force to stop crime, punish evildoers and keep order—say, through the local police force. Or, on a larger scale, force may be

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necessary to stop aggression and tyranny—as when the Allied troops attempted to stop the spread of Nazism. In both scenarios, the goal is to restore peace. These are good deeds Christians can engage in.

3. *Force versus violence:* While all violence is force, not all force is violence. Proper force is motivated by both justice and love of neighbor; it is aimed at restoring peace; it is carried out by a proper authority. Violence is not inspired by justice and love but by greed and hatred; it is not aimed at restoring peace but at destruction and evoking terror; it is not carried out by a proper authority. The issue is not violence versus no violence, but a legitimate use of force versus an illegitimate one.[18]
4. *Physical versus spiritual:* A human life is *not* of "infinite worth," even though humans are made in God's image. Furthermore, continued physical life is not the supreme value. It is better to lose one's life in faithfulness to Christ and in commitment to the well-being of others.
5. *Earthly versus post-mortem life:* A plaque we (the Copans) have in our home expresses this: "Only one life, / 'Twill soon be past. / Only what's done for Christ / Will last." We are all going to die. Our lives are but a vapor—whether cut short by illness or even lived out to the weakness of old age. This is nothing compared to everlasting life.
6. *Church versus state:* Church and state both divinely ordained and have value—though never ultimate. Our ultimate "pledge of allegiance" is not to a country or church, but to Christ (Phil 1:21). On the other hand, the church is a family that extends across national boundaries, and as citizens of heaven, we have stronger ties with Christians of other lands than with non-Christians in their transient citizenship here on earth.
7. *Human rights and freedom versus order:* Rights and freedom are valuable, but none are of absolute value. (Anarchy is freedom gone mad.) The government has a responsibility to preserve order, but not to tyrannize. (Tyranny is order gone mad.) Our rights are limited as we coexist with others. To overthrow order for the sake of rights and freedoms may be too high a price to pay.

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God's sovereignty. Though human beings are responsible for their behavior, individual and corporate, God in his sovereign wisdom will bring his purposes to a successful conclusion—whether through human instrumentality, just or unjust, or through divine intervention (Rom 8:28; Eph 1:11). His purposes will not be thwarted (Ps 2). Justice and righteousness will triumph at last, and in this confidence his people can rest, whether oppressed or free.

Human responsibility for war. Even though God is sovereign and can bring good and direct history through the choices of human beings, humankind may not lay the blame for war on God or Satan, for humans are responsible for war, one of the most grievous results of their sinfulness. Because of this sinful, selfish disposition, conflict is inevitable, and for this sinful behavior humans are accountable to God.

A second aspect of human responsibility is that humans have been chosen as instruments both of God's judgment and grace. God has chosen civil governments as the primary agents of his judgment and preserving order, and the church as the primary agent of his grace. If he waited for perfectly good and wise people to mediate his purposes on earth, his purposes would go unaccomplished. So human government—whether family or state or employer—is hobbled by its own finitude and fallenness. Nevertheless, it is God's own instrument.

We should add that a nation or group of nations may engage in a truly just war, but the fact that missteps may be made does not undermine the overall justice of the war. Even if certain powers veer off course—out-of-control soldiers who engage in rape or kill noncombatants, or a misguided plan that causes more destruction than necessary—this does not negate the overall justice of the cause. The fact that missteps or moral violations may be made, say, on the part of the Allies in their attempt to stop the Nazis and the Japanese does not put the Allies and Axis powers on equal moral footing or negate the justice of the cause.

Now, some might suggest that what some call a just war may not have been a truly last resort; after all, maybe one or two further attempts could have averted war. We can talk about giving principled diplomacy a strong or reasonable chance. But we should also consider the track records of

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thugs and tyrants who have had a history of breaking one promise after another. Well-grounded trust is one thing; gullibility or misguided optimism is another.

Torture and Human Dignity

In the post-9/11 world of countering terrorism, the media have focused attention on whether certain methods such as "waterboarding"—repeatedly pouring water over the face of the immobilized suspect—or other "enhanced interrogation techniques" constitute torture. Christian ethicist David Gushee spearheaded the drafting of the 2007 Evangelical Declaration Against Torture (EDAT). But fellow evangelical Keith Pavlischek of the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington criticized the document because it nowhere actually defined torture. While Christians would likely agree that torture is inherently evil, not all are agreed on the methods that are used. For example, does inflicting pain or frightening or deceiving a terrorist constitute torture? If so, Pavlischek argues, then so do spanking, handcuffing and riot control. On the other hand, certain practices such as electric shock, bodily mutilation or sodomizing a prisoner would be wrong. No one should "do evil that good may come"; one should not justify certain immoral measures simply in the hope that a prisoner may divulge valuable information. But does shouting at or scaring a prisoner constitute torture?[19] Sometimes what one person considers torture—say, threatening a self-acknowledged terrorist in the quest for further information—may be nothing of the sort. The term *torture* is sometimes used in like manner as "cruel and unusual"—a slippery and often highly subjective judgment. Some plausibly argue that torture is immoral because it involves *permanent* physical and psychological harm rather than temporary harm or threat; this, it seems, is the appropriate dividing line to bring greater ethical clarity to the issue.

Furthermore, the EDAT document is methodologically problematic: one can ask the questions related to interrogation ("torture") as a Christian pacifist, or one can ask them as a Christian just-war proponent, but the document does not serve as a "teaching document" for *both* sides. For example, the document's reference to "the right not to have one's life

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taken *unjustly*" is something *pacifists* would dispute; however, *just war advocates* would dispute a position that left out the word "unjustly." That said, Gushee and Pavlischek both agree that torture is wrong and that there are strict conditions or specified limits beyond which interrogators should not go. Gushee acknowledges too that there is "some flexibility in applying pressure to encourage prisoners to reveal information that could save lives."[20]

Nuclear war. *Conventional versus nuclear*. Is nuclear warfare qualitatively different from conventional warfare or only different in scale? In an article significantly titled, "The 'End' of Just War Theory," Donald Heinz states unequivocally not only that nuclear warfare is qualitatively different, but also that a consensus is developing toward what has been called "nuclear pacifism." Given the far greater scale of destruction, he asserts: "Thinking Christians will need to come to terms with the powerful consensus in Protestant and Roman Catholic ethics that all or nearly all nuclear war is impossible on just war grounds."[21]

Civilian population. Some say nuclear war is qualitatively different because civilian populations are the object of warfare. Others counter that strategic warheads can be used against military objectives alone. But the issue is fuzzy on two counts. First, though just war theory in the Middle Ages developed the idea of the protection of civilian populations, historically, this has often been difficult to achieve. In some cases, soldiers may embed themselves in civilian areas, making strict military fighting difficult if not impossible.

Second, there may be cases of supreme emergency that require stronger measures to bring war to an end. Franklin Roosevelt spoke against the Japanese when they bombed Nanking in 1937: "This Government holds the view that any general bombing of an extensive area wherein there resides a large populace engaged in peaceful pursuits is unwarranted and contrary to the principles of law and humanity." But a few years later America under Franklin Roosevelt engaged in obliteration bombing in both Germany and Japan. The purpose was to break the will of a people to fight, and in this the approach was successful—a tragic necessity. A Japanese pastor once told me (Robertson) the bombing of Hiroshima and

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Nagasaki saved multitudes—perhaps millions—who would have died in the struggle of conventional war. This is borne out by the work of World War II Marine and historian E. B. Sledge, who with remarkable accuracy documented his encounters with the ruthless, cruel Japanese forces during the harrowing ten weeks of fighting at Peleliu and Okinawa (September to November 1944). Even after the bombs were dropped on Japan (August 6, 1945) and its subsequent surrender, Sledge said, "We thought the Japanese would never surrender. Many refused to believe it."[22] Whatever one thinks of this much-debated war-ending act, there do appear to be some atrocities so brutal and threats so grave that it would be wrong not to act with appropriate force to protect the innocent and to restore order when it is in one's power to do so (see Prov 24:11-12).

Third, protection of the civilian population may be difficult to defend logically. Perhaps, as Reinhold Niebuhr suggests, the concept of protecting the civilian population arose more from knightly chivalry than from carefully reasoned ethical distinctions. It is difficult to see how a soldier drafted to serve his country in the army is any more or any less "innocent" than his brother left to work on the farm, producing grain to feed the army. The whole nation participates—either all adults are guilty or none except those in power. One thing is certain, if any nation publicly committed itself to refrain from touching civilian population centers, the enemy could have instant immunity for military preparation by making sure that military installations were embedded within civilian populations. However, though the idea of protecting "innocent" civilians may be difficult to defend logically, impossible to perfectly follow, and rarely implemented, most ethicists and ethically sensitive civilized people recoil from the idea of deliberately attacking civilians.

End result. There is one element in nuclear warfare that does seem distinctly different. Just war theory holds that war is legitimate only if the end result in view is of greater value than the potential loss in securing that end. In an all-out nuclear exchange, what would be left of any possible value compared to the total loss of people and property? Even so, some hold that the freedom from oppression gained by the survivors would be worthwhile and that even the prospect of losing everything should not deter a

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people from defending justice or liberty, even if it means national self-sacrifice. Though the ethics of the distinction between conventional and nuclear war may be debated, that there can be a qualitative difference in outcome seems clear.

Options for response. Since 1945, we no longer have the option of living in a nuclear-free world. But we can and must work toward peace with justice in a nuclear age. The disintegration of the former Soviet Empire changed the equation but does not diffuse the issue, particularly when rogue nations or Islamic terrorists set their sights on acquiring nuclear arms. To ignore or dismiss such possibilities miscalculates the sinfulness of human beings and the harm some of them are willing to do their enemies. Some rogue, malicious nations will simply refuse to negotiate—or will be utterly untrustworthy in keeping their word. Again, think back to Munich in 1938, when Hitler "played" the British—making still more promises he never intended to keep.

Ultimately, our hope is in God—not in the assurance of immunity from war or in the strength of armies or potent weapons. In the translation of Martin Luther's words, "The body they may kill. / God's truth abideth still. / His kingdom is forever." We *will* die. The time and manner of death are all that is in question. And that is true for all of us.

Nuclear war presents us with a horrible dilemma and horrific consequences. Nuclear warfare should not be accepted as a normal way for settling international differences; all ethically sensitive people should work toward the ideal of, first, control; then, limitation; next, reduction; and finally, elimination of nuclear weapons. Yet simple unilateral reduction by certain well-intentioned nations will only further embolden tyrants to do their worst.

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Crime and Punishment

A crime is some activity or negligence that a human authority has decided should be punished, usually because it is deemed injurious to others. *Crime* and *sin* are not synonymous. *Sin* is Godward, and not all sin is criminal (lust or pride). And not all *crime* is sinful (publicly proclaiming Christ in certain societies).

Crime and its punishment are determined by a society, presumably for the welfare of its members and hopefully based on objective moral principles. Since crime is against others, it normally violates the biblical law of love and often harms another person. Thus, broadly speaking, it fits under the sixth commandment. The punishment of crime is certainly a life issue—depriving criminals of part or all of their lives as free citizens. But controversy rages as to the cause of crime, the nature of crime, the purpose of punishment, and the kind of punishment a just and merciful society may employ. On these issues the Bible sheds significant light.

Philosophical Issues

The cause of crime. Until the end of the nineteenth century, crime in the West was generally considered the outworking of a sinful disposition. And even where moral implications were disallowed, crime was universally considered an act for which the criminals themselves were responsible. That began to change in the last century with other proposed explanations—physiological, psychological, sociological. Through Freud's influence, mentally sick persons are not responsible for their behavior. The end result of the general acceptance of this approach was to distinguish

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between criminals who were normal and thus responsible for their crime and those who were abnormal and needed treatment, not punishment. A legal definition of insanity, determined by the Supreme Court in the M'Naghten Rule (1843), was gradually refined until most courts in the United States came to rely on the American Law Institute Rule, which states that "a person is not responsible for criminal conduct if at the time of such conduct as a result of mental disease or defect he lacks *substantial capacity to appreciate* the wrongfulness of his conduct or to conform his conduct to the requirements of the law."[1]

With the advent of sociology, the line of reason initiated earlier by psychology has been taken much further. Not just the mentally ill, but all people are products of their environment—a point behaviorist B. F. Skinner drove home in his *Walden Two.* So the person who commits a crime is not guilty, but the society (environment) that produced such a person. Famed psychiatrist Karl Menninger's book *The Crime of Punishment* argues that the crimes committed against criminals are greater than the crimes they commit.[2] Today, many psychologists challenge the very concept of mental illness.

Who is to judge which person is abnormal or "ill"? We've all been shaped by our culture, and each person's behavior is normal to that person. Thus cultural relativism leads inexorably to radical personal autonomy and the rejection of all behavioral norms—a downward spiral that still continues. This viewpoint increasingly prevails in one form or another and has profound effects on a society's view of crime and punishment. Scripture teaches that environment has a very powerful influence on a person. Criminals have been strongly influenced by their environments, and, hopefully, a change of environment might assist them toward making better choices. But determining what elements in a person's environment were most influential and trying to create an environment that will help a person change for the better seem very elusive.

Does poverty produce criminal behavior? This is doubtful. For example, criminal activity in America did not rise during the Great Depression. The late James Q. Wilson documented how for decades before 1960, the population grew by the millions, the murder rate steadily fell, and poverty was

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declining. However, after this time, America's legal system and idea-shapers began to focus on "root causes" of crime to figure out why criminals did what they did. In addition, the government and legal system increased the number of prisoners' "rights," gave lighter sentences, and delayed the execution of convicted death-row criminals. From 1961 to 1974, the murder rate would more than double, and employment of non-whites increased. Poverty was certainly not the problem.[3]

Blaming society means abdicating personal responsibility for the direction of one's life. And this refusal to own up to one's wrongdoing shuts the door to the possibility of salvation by God's grace. The Bible is much more realistic (see part three, "Sin"). It both recognizes the influence of environment ("the world") and thus the responsibility of people to create as good an environment as possible for others as well as for themselves. It also recognizes the role of responsible choice. Our path to the proper solution for crime means each person taking responsibility for his own actions. Crime's root is sin, and the final responsibility for crime rests with the sinner. Lack of discipline or love in the home, failure of justice in society, evil companions and poor education all may contribute, but in the final analysis, we sin because we are sinners and choose to sin—and thus contribute to the deterioration of our character.

Though some blame the courts and the process of criminal justice for the increase in crime, others blame the educational system, the violence and sex of television, narcotics, racial discrimination, and unemployment. We believe the breakdown of the *family* is the leading negative environmental influence. Public education and the media share major responsibility in eroding virtue and moral duty.

Since environment is a major influence in the formation of human personality and character, we must work to make it as just and merciful as humanly possible. At the same time, we must insist that each person is responsible for her own moral destiny and is held accountable for any conduct that is injurious to others.

Nature of crime. While God punishes sin, humans punish crime. Since humans are not authorized to punish sin, society must wisely determine which sins are criminal and therefore punishable. While it is a neutral

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matter that the British drive on the left rather than right side of the road, a good deal of law has to do with morality. And by making a matter law, it becomes a moral issue.

What about "private" morality? Most people would agree that private sins should not be punished in law courts. But what is "private sin"? Ultimately, no sin is truly private, since every sin has an adverse effect on others in the life of the sinner. Consider how men who view pornography in private are adversely affected in their (objectified) view of women and intimacy in marriage. Drinking may be private, but so many homicides and traffic fatalities in the United States are alcohol related.

To say "you can't legislate morality" is false. We are grateful that the government criminalizes rape, murder and child abuse. But governments should be careful not to over-legislate either. It seems that all that can be done by law is to hold a person accountable for unwarranted injury to another's property or person or for behavior that might jeopardize another. Because of this legitimate distinction between sin and crime, a strong movement has emerged toward decriminalizing "victimless" crimes—crimes in which there is no complainant. These include drug use, drunkenness, gambling, vagrancy, prostitution and pornography. Of course, if all these were decriminalized, a large portion of the current law enforcement overload would be eliminated.

Any behavior that a society believes is directly or potentially injurious to others may be legitimately outlawed. Of course, a society is responsible to enact only laws that it intends to enforce and can enforce. Any behavior, private or public, victimless or not, which a society declares criminal and then does not enforce undermines the rule of law, promoting a lawless society.

So the crucial element in lawmaking is not whether an act is private or whether there is a direct victim who complains, but whether that society judges the behavior to be potentially or actually injurious to others and whether society has the will to enforce the legislation.

Purpose of Punishment

Rehabilitation. Whether in the judgment of Israel in the Old Testament or the discipline of church members in the New, God's primary purpose

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in punishment has always been the restoration of the sinner. "Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, says the Lord God, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?" (Ezek 18:23 RSV; cf. 1 Cor 5:5; 1 Tim 1:19-20). So the position of humanitarian criminologists that rehabilitation is the purpose of punishment has strong biblical precedent. But contemporary theory makes rehabilitation virtually the only valid reason for punishment, and most Western governments have abandoned such efforts. Moreover, apart from regeneration, the only factor known to improve the behavior of criminals is age—moving to mature adulthood, during which time criminal activity lessens.[4]

Deterrence. A second biblical reason for punishment is to deter others from doing wrong. "As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear" (1 Tim 5:20 RSV). Both Testaments indicate that punishment can serve as a warning to other potential lawbreakers (Deut 17:12-13; Acts 5:1-11; Rom 13:1-7). Despite the claim that rehabilitation alone (and not deterrence) is the purpose of punishment, it seems manifestly clear that punishment—particularly prompt, consistent punishment—does deter. Consider police-strike situations when there is little or no enforcement of criminal law; criminal activity rises sharply.[5]

The penologist Ernest van den Haag emphasizes the deterrent and quarantine value of imprisonment as over against elusive rehabilitation. He suggests more severe sentences for second-time offenders committing serious crimes. He advocates not releasing violent, serial criminals before age forty, since few people commit violent crimes after age thirty-five.[6]

An additional benefit of incarceration is that letting dangerous criminals loose is *more costly* to society than incarcerating them. For example, in 2008 Britain's total cost of the prison system per year was found to be 1.9 billion pounds sterling; in contrast, the financial cost alone of crimes committed per year by criminals was approximately 60 billion pounds sterling.[7]

Though there is no consensus as to what actually deters a person from criminal behavior, there is something of a consensus that the certainty and swiftness of apprehension and punishment do deter. But if sure and swift punishment is the greatest deterrent, our present system can hardly be expected to deter.

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Protection of the innocent. A third legitimate purpose of two forms of punishment—imprisonment and execution—is to protect others from criminals. Western society seems to increasingly emphasize the quarantine purpose of imprisonment. While over 95 percent of present American inmates will be returned to society, around two-thirds of them will commit further crime.

Scripture is filled with admonitions to protect the innocent and helpless—the widow, the fatherless, the alien, the weak. Government is established so that citizens may lead a "quiet and peaceable life" (1 Tim 2:2 RSV). Therefore, any just society must create structures to protect its citizens—something our society is not doing well at present. Prison sentences are short, early parole the rule, and subsequent crime all but certain.

Restitution is one form of protecting the rights of crime victims and the state which has gained some attention, thanks to the work of Prison Fellowship (PF), founded by the late Charles Colson. This ministry recognizes the vital role of restitution—a concept found in the Mosaic law (e.g., Ex 22:12; Lev 6:2-5; Num 5:7): criminals pay back the *victims* (and the government) for damages done; they should also give back to the community through various work projects for the benefit of society at large. Merely "warehousing" prisoners is inadequate. Restitution, however, affirms the criminal's dignity and moral responsibility without minimizing the proper place of punishment. Yet we should make room for restorative justice. Of course, Prison Fellowship recognizes the transforming role of the gospel: prisoners making a commitment to Christ and growing in their faith while in prison are far less likely to return to crime and end up back in prison.[8]

Punitive. Retribution is the one purpose almost universally disallowed by many inside and outside the church; it is considered "uncivilized" because of its apparent vindictiveness. Yet justice means giving to a person his due—giving what is deserved. So we cannot neglect the place of just desert—a vindication of justice in proportion to the crime committed. Yet, though this is not the sole reason given in Scripture, the New Testament clearly identifies the vindication of justice as one basic purpose of criminal punishment. Government officials are established to mete out vengeance on evildoers (Rom 13:4: "to execute his wrath on the wrongdoer" [RSV];

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1 Pet 2:14: "to punish those who do wrong" [RSV]). In the Old Testament, an "eye for an eye" (*lex talionis*) demanded proportionality: the punishment must fit the crime. Retribution, then, is not revenge, which springs from personal animosity or hostility.

Once we have abandoned the criterion of *desert,* C. S. Lewis said, "all punishments have to be justified, if at all, on other grounds that have nothing to do with desert."[9] Moreover, "when we cease to consider what the criminal deserves and consider only what will cure him or deter others, we have tacitly removed him from the sphere of justice altogether; instead of a person, a subject of rights, we now have a mere object, a patient, a 'case.'"[10] Therapy or rehabilitation should not be a substitute for justice: "How can you pardon a man for having a gumboil or a club foot?"[11] Furthermore, *granting pardon* or *mercy* implies guilt and desert: "Mercy, detached from Justice, grows unmerciful. . . . Mercy will flower only when it grows in the crannies of the rock of Justice."[12]

All four purposes of punishment for crime are biblically valid and should be emphasized in law and criminal justice. The biblical order of priority in emphasis is probably (1) rehabilitation, (2) justice, (3) protection of the innocent and (4) deterrence.

Varieties of Punishment

Good law versus bad law. In general good law reinforces moral standards, and bad law weakens moral standards. There are many ways to create bad law or systems of justice.

Unenforceable law (or laws that society does not choose to enforce, such as America's Prohibition) is bad because nonenforcement undermines respect for the law and promotes corruption among the citizenry and law enforcement officials.

Unjust law comes in many forms. It is unjust to accept hearsay evidence or to convict without adequate evidence. It is unjust to subject a victim of sexual assault or child abuse to repeated emotional and mental assault, shame, and intimidation in the courtroom. One pervasive form of injustice in our present system is that the poor and those without friends in high places do not have adequate legal representation as the wealthy who know

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how to work the system. What of a law requiring a prison sentence for shoplifting fifty dollars' worth of merchandise while there is no law to keep the owner of the chain store from unjustly depriving the government of hundreds of thousands of dollars in income tax.

Inappropriate or unequal punishment is another kind of bad law. For instance, while ordinary criminals may receive harsh penalties, media or music celebrities often get their wrists slapped. But such disproportionate penalties regularly extend beyond this demographic. In October 1964 in Sicily, Gaetano Furnari killed a college professor who had seduced his daughter; in Manila a Chinese businessman was apprehended for kissing his Filipino secretary five years earlier. The murderer and the kisser were both given four years in prison. At about the same time, I (Robertson) read in a Tokyo newspaper the story of some young men who got drunk, captured a swan from the imperial palace moat, roasted the swan, and were given four years in prison. Buried in an inside column of the same paper was the brief report of a young mother who deliberately drowned her infant in a cesspool; she was given a two-year sentence, suspended. Good law and good law enforcement must be equitable and appropriate to the crime. In protecting the innocent, good law does not make an unwarranted infringement on the rights and freedoms of others. This delicate balance is difficult but is the object of good law.

Nonpunishment. Is it always wrong for society not to punish a crime? Apparently not, since crimes went unpunished in the annals of Scripture. Although God severely judged the household of the wife-stealing, murderous king David, David himself was not punished according to the Mosaic law—although death came to his family as a result (2 Sam 12:10). In Hosea, Gomer the harlot is not executed—although she would serve as an illustration of rebellious Israel in the face of divine, wooing love. Paul was a persecutor of the church but would become an apostle of Christ. This does not mean that crime should be overlooked or that criminal justice should be subverted; Scripture is abundantly clear on that. But it does mean that mercy and forgiveness may sometimes be legitimate without violating justice, but mercy can only make sense in the context of justice.

Alternatives to imprisonment. The American system of imprisonment

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is the primary sanction against crime, whereas in Scripture it was not mandated for that purpose. The prison system has utterly failed in three of the four purposes of punishment. It only functions well as a just form of punishment; retributive justice is served—although, insofar as criminals are behind bars, they will not be a danger to the public (protection of the innocent). And despite rampant violence, corruption, drugs and homosexual activity in our prisons, we see no serious attempts at prison reform. Are there any viable alternatives?

Deprivation of privilege is a common form of punishment, whether relatively light (loss of a driver's license or right to vote) or severe (losing one's license to practice medicine or law). Perhaps there are other creative ways to match the crime with appropriate deprivation of something of value other than freedom to live in normal society.

Corporal punishment is unlikely to be acceptable any time soon in Western society. Banishment, or exile, formerly common, also has fallen out of favor except in the deportation of criminal aliens. It would seem less cruel than the typical prison environment, but that would depend largely on the place of exile. Military service is used in some societies as a form of punishment. None of these could be ruled out on biblical grounds, but none is likely to be acceptable in America today.

There is one present form of punishment that could be greatly expanded—the monetary fine or expropriation of property. The convicted criminal could be required to pay a stipulated amount to the victim and to the government (for costs of apprehension and prosecution) in monthly installments if necessary. This could be restricted to the 75 percent of the prison population who are not guilty of violent crimes. Supervising such a program would be a fraction of the cost of incarceration, and the victim would have some hope of restitution for the loss suffered. A by-product would be to keep first offenders from the prison "schoolhouse in crime" and the brutalizing effect of prison.

Other alternatives would be a community service assignment or an assignment to serve or care for the victim in some way. These might be especially appropriate for juvenile offenders, many of whom are guilty of truancy, incorrigibility and other offenses that would not be punishable as

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an adult criminal. These juveniles crowd the system and are society's greatest loss. Surely a society with creativity sufficient to put a person on the moon need not settle for a failed system of punishment here on earth.

Capital Punishment

There are two prevailing views on what Scripture teaches about executing convicted capital offenders: those who advocate abolition of capital punishment and those who advocate capital punishment for premeditated homicide.

Abolition of capital punishment. Britain abolished the death penalty in December 1969, and a number of other nations have followed. In the United States, only seventeen states and the District of Columbia outlaw capital punishment. The Old Testament permits capital punishment for certain crimes. Scholarly debate whether all sixteen or so crimes would have been capitally punished, apart from, say, murder or idolatry. Instead, monetary payment would have been utilized. Passages advancing the death penalty for sabbath-breaking or rebelling against parents were likely viewed as maximum penalties to present a tone of severity, even though judges would typically have opted for lesser penalties (cf. Ex 21:30).[13] For example, the "indecency" (Deut 24:1-4) as grounds for divorce includes adultery, but in this case, the death penalty is not mandated.

Now, no biblical scholar assumes that contemporary societies should put to death an idolater. The Mosaic law was not intended to be universally applied. Further, biblical advocates of abolition hold that the teaching of Christ deliberately set aside capital punishment. Did not Jesus set aside the Old Testament's *lex talionis* (Ex 21:23-25), the eye-for-an-eye demand for equivalent retribution (Mt 5:38-42)? He emphasizes that divorce—not death—for adultery is morally permissible (Mt 5:31-32; 19:9). For sexual immorality in Corinth, Paul mentions excommunication as the penalty (1 Cor 5).

Doesn't the New Testament's law of love rule out capital punishment? How can one love the one he is executing? Isn't this the very opposite of being pro-life?

Death penalty for premeditated homicide. Though some advocates of capital punishment hold that the death penalty should be applied in cases

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of rape and treason, most who write on the subject speak primarily of murder as the one capital offense. Some advocate that capital punishment should be reserved for the *most heinous* kinds of murder—say, mass murder or genocidal acts such as in Rwanda or the former Yugoslavia. Various scholars will point to a more universalizing text like Genesis 9:6 to legitimize capital punishment: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed" (RSV).

Others will suggest that this is a *proverb*—much like Jesus' statement that those who take up the sword will perish by the sword (Mt 26:52); that is, violence and bloodshed lead to more of the same. However, Genesis text continues: "for in the image of God has God made man." The text more likely indicates something more than proverbial—namely, to the legitimacy of capital punishment as an adequate retribution for violating the divine image. Though the structure of the Hebrew could either be a statement of fact or a command, biblical scholars generally hold that a command was intended.

Advocates hold that the New Testament also is clear. Jesus seems to assume capital punishment (cf. Mt 15:4). And as we noted, Paul's instruction on civil authority (Rom 13:4) speaks of the sword not merely as a symbol of authority or even imprisonment—the use of "avenger" and "wrath" would not fit here—but as a symbol of the specific authority to execute.

Can executing a criminal be done in love? It seems so—as with the same reluctant love that God shows in letting sinners go their way and separate themselves from God. Certainly, those with the heavy responsibility to take a human life should do so in light of strong evidence—and with reluctance and sorrow rather than pleasure. And criminals on death row have an uncommon opportunity to know in advance the time of their death and to repent and prepare to meet their Maker.

Does capital punishment deter more than other punishment? The question is hotly debated. The criminal underworld certainly thinks it deters and so applies the principle ruthlessly. The deterrent value, if any, is greatly reduced because few expect to meet such a fate. Even when capital punishment was in full force in the United States, fewer than 1 percent of murderers were executed. Furthermore, the majority of

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murders are crimes of passion—family members or close acquaintances. Of course, those who forfeit their lives will not kill again; obviously, this would deter them from committing any future crimes.

To some degree, the threat of capital punishment can have a sobering effect on would-be perpetrators (Deut 17:12-13; cf. Acts 5:11). Yet deterrent value is the least important consideration when it comes to biblical reasons for punishment.

Conclusion. Our personal conclusion is a mediating one. Capital punishment cannot be inherently immoral because God mandates this for universal application (Gen 9:6). On the other hand, God himself did not insist on it, either for the first murderer, Cain, or for the most prominent, David. Therefore, it cannot be wrong to show mercy, although mercy cannot be properly understood without first grasping justice and desert. In the light of this biblical tension, it seems to us that the death penalty should be viewed more as a prerogative of human government than as a mandate.

Therefore, for capital punishment to be properly appropriated, it should not be carried out when gross social injustices have not been eliminated. By "injustices," we mean, for example, the former pattern in America in which 50 percent of those executed between 1930 and 1967 were black. Black killing of a white brought almost certain death, white killing of a black almost never. Furthermore, executions were reserved primarily for the poor and ignorant who could not afford adequate representation or did not understand how to seek assistance. Often they were mentally retarded, almost always poorly educated.

Another form of injustice, mistaken execution of the innocent, has been overemphasized. The most liberal estimates of all varieties of crime in which innocent persons have been convicted is up to 5 percent. In capital cases, where no expense is spared and no avenue of defense is unprobed, such error is highly unlikely, but in the rare instance when it may occur, one is faced with the alternative of what the lack of this sanction may do in a society. As much as the naturalistic humanitarian might protest, extension of physical life is not the ultimate value. Further, lifelong imprisonment as opposed to the death penalty is itself a serious deprivation and loss. Also, simply because governments have divine authority to capitally

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execute (Rom 13:4), the expectation is that they will be pursuing justice rather than violating it. For example, Pilate did wrong in allowing Jesus to be killed (Jn 18:38; Acts 3:13-17); Stephen was unjustly stoned (Acts 7). Indeed, there are times when God must be obeyed over against human authorities (Acts 5:29).

Some complain that capital punishment unfairly discriminates against, say, blacks and minorities or the poor. As we noted earlier, we should distinguish between punishment and actual crimes committed. Sadly, 94 percent of black murders are committed by other blacks, who are responsible for 50 percent of all homicides in America, though they represent 13 percent of the population. The charge of unfair discrimination deals with the law's unjust *application*—not with capital punishment itself. In general, we don't abolish laws simply because they are unequally applied. For example, a police officer may, for whatever reason, be inconsistent in stopping only some speeding drivers or stopping speeding drivers at some times but not at others.

In summary, if capital punishment is part of a reasonably just system and is used only in cases of premeditated murder with no mitigating factors and certain evidence, it would probably enhance the value of life and the fabric of justice in a society. But if it is invoked capriciously or in unjust ways, it would be better to set aside this God-given prerogative of human government.

Christian Responsibility for Criminal Justice

What can the individual Christian and the church do toward promoting a just and merciful society, other than by being just and merciful and teaching God's standards?

Rehabilitation. Although this is considered by many to be the primary purpose of punishment, there is a growing consensus that our present system works directly opposite. And here the church and individual Christians must do all within their power to promote the one thing that *can* rehabilitate—regeneration. To persuade individuals to take responsibility for their own failures is the first step. But more is needed—to know of God's forgiving grace, to become a new creation, to have a caring family of

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God, especially after their release. This is the kind of work that Prison Fellowship does, and its volunteers participate in friendship, mentoring, Bible study, care for prisoners' families. Its late founder, Charles Colson, was the former chief counsel under Richard Nixon. He was convicted and imprisoned for his involvement in the Watergate break-in, but became a believer in Christ. Perhaps Colson has helped to show us the way to obey Christ's injunction to visit those in prison (Mt 25:36, 39, 43-45). It is dreadful to note what Christ promised those who *fail* to visit prisoners. Christians actually hold the only proven key to transforming criminals and making them good citizens—of earth *and* heaven!

Punishment. If we insist that retributive justice must be restored as a primary purpose in criminal punishment, we must work hard toward a more just system of criminal justice. As citizens in a democracy we cannot sit by and shout "law and order"—or "lock them up and throw away the key." We must listen carefully to prisoners and prison staff, scrutinize the system and, where necessary, insist on improved laws and their enforcement. While *prisons* partially fulfill the retributive purpose of punishment, our *system* does not, in that most crime goes unpunished. We must work toward the justice of consistent apprehension as well as justice in sentencing and punishment.

Protection of the innocent. Fewer and fewer Americans are willing to take the risk of personal involvement in reporting crime. The Christian must act in love for the innocent by stopping crime through direct action, at least by reporting all crime or suspicious activity. It may prove costly, but that is what love is all about. This action is the loving response toward the criminal as well. Criminals need to be protected from accumulating ever greater guilt and to have opportunity for enforced reflection on their wicked ways and their certain end.

More stringent pretrial qualifications of bail/bond release, longer prison terms and less parole may protect society in about 25 percent of the cases. But upwards of 75 percent of convicted criminals could be punished in alternative ways at no risk of violence. We may need to redirect some of our very limited resources in criminal justice.

Deterrence. Deterrence depends, we are told, not on the severity of the

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threatened punishment so much as on the certainty and swiftness of apprehension and punishment. Solomon agreed (Eccles 8:11). Private citizens can assist in making apprehension more swift and certain by reporting crime or suspicious activity, but they can also contribute through advocating legal and fiscal reform. For example, more tax revenues could be allotted to criminal justice efforts, such as the development of alternative systems of punishment. This would not only reduce the overcrowded condition of prisons (which contributes to their failure), but would also make room for the enormous backlog of pending cases, which, as much as anything else, works toward long delays in prosecution and a tendency toward a light sentence and early release.

But the greatest contribution the Christian and the church can make toward deterrence is to faithfully teach God's holy standards and God's holy judgment.

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PART IX

INTEGRITY

Property and Truth

You shall not steal.
You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

Apart from eternal life, integrity may be the most precious possession I have, its violation my greatest loss. Can I be trusted? If not, all of my other characteristics become uncertain, jeopardizing all other values and undermining all relationships. Even communication ultimately depends on the confidence that what the other person says is reliable, what she does is trustworthy. No wonder Satan is called the father of lies, the ultimate cheat. And God is the trustworthy one. Although integrity touches every aspect of Christian behavior, the eighth and ninth commandments focus our attention on two aspects: property and truth. In this part, we look at labor and management, work and leisure, economic systems, poverty and theft, and finally, truth and deception.

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26

Labor and Management, Work and Leisure

Private Property and Taxation

The prohibition of stealing (Ex 20:15) recognizes the right of private property. In the Old Testament, the land of Israel—indeed, the whole earth—belonged to the Lord, yet the land was entrusted to Israel's families (Lev 19:9: "your land"). Even the post-Pentecost Jerusalem church was not "communist" in that believers had "everything in common" (Acts 4:32); this was a *voluntary* act, and the rest of Scripture does not indicate that such a pattern is normative. As Peter told the cheating Ananias about his property, "While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal?" (Acts 5:4 RSV). Further, Paul condemns freeloading: people should work with their own hands; if they don't, they shouldn't eat (2 Thess 3:10, 12; see Paul's example in Acts 20:34; 1 Thess 2:9; 2 Thess 3:8).

While Karl Marx regarded private property as oppressive and stated that it should be abolished, it would be wrong to say that taxation violates the eighth commandment. While taking private property for granted, Scripture indicates that government taxation has its place. This was seen throughout the Old Testament, and both Christ and the apostles affirmed it in the New. Christ was accused of teaching against paying taxes (Lk 23:2), but when he himself was asked, he affirmed the right of the government to tax and the obligation of Christ's disciple to pay it (Mt 22:17, 21; Mk 12:14, 17; Lk 20:22, 25). Paul affirmed this obligation (Rom 13:7). However, there is one caveat: taxation in our day may be used for unjust

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or immoral causes—tax-funded abortion, welfare programs that perpetuate dependence and reward indolence—and where possible, dissenting citizens should seek to change such misuses.

Further, *how* one helps the poor also matters. This should not be measured in mere dollar amounts, whether here or abroad. Consider how trillions—yes, trillions—of foreign "aid" dollars have been given to impoverished nations to help their poor and hungry citizens, only to have this money go into the pockets of bureaucrats and dictators for lavish homes and lifestyles as well as for building up their military machine.

Labor and Management

Although the social context of Bible times was radically different from contemporary democratic society, the principles enunciated for slave-owner relationships are so humanitarian in their protection of the oppressed that they are easily transferable to labor-management relationships in the post-slavery era in which we live, an era brought about through the influence of New Testament teaching. For example, in his letters to the churches at Ephesus (Eph 6:5-9) and Colossae (Col 3:22–4:1), Paul gives principles for both employer and employee.

Responsibilities of labor and management. Both labor and management are to work for God. Work is to be treated as service to God/Christ because God instituted work as a good gift—evidenced by God's work at creation and beyond (e.g., Jn 5:17)—and it is central to our human vocation (Gen 1:27-28). Further, there is both reward and punishment from God himself. Payday someday, yes, but benefits and losses now as well, from the master of both. In Christ, there is no slave or free (Gal 3:28). Human worth is not measured by what one produces or by the abundance of what one has (Lk 12:15). Work may be carried out *without* the pursuit of monetary or material gain, as when the returned exiles set to "work" to repair Jerusalem's broken walls (Neh 4:6, 15). And we could speak of work after retirement, even if one is not employed.

Employees are to work "from the heart," humble in attitude, fearful before God of wronging their employer. Employers are to be humbly fearful of wronging their employees. Furthermore, both are to relate hon-

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estly with one another, without hypocrisy. They are not to appear one way in the presence of the other and behind their back behave in a contrary way. Straightforward, open and courteous discussion must take place in the context of mutual trust—not only standing by public agreements but intentionally working for the welfare of the other.

The atmosphere and attitude at work is to be cordial and even cheerful—a challenge when colleagues do not behave in a Christlike manner. But it is nevertheless the standard required by the master whom both serve. Paul says that this means the worker will work diligently and faithfully. And he says of the owner, "in like manner."

Responsibilities of management. Managers must not threaten. They have power over the welfare and livelihood of their employees—which affects the employees' families; employers must not use their power to coerce. When an employer demands something unethical or illegal from an employee, such as offering a bribe to a prospective customer or demanding sexual favors, the sins of cheating and immorality are compounded by the use of economic coercion.

Furthermore, all working arrangements, including pay, must be just. Unsafe working conditions in a coal mine or chemical plant are certainly unjust. What about minimum wage? This can be a contentious issue, but increasing the minimum wage, ironically and sadly, leads to an *increase in unemployment,* as it prevents companies from hiring more workers. Why hire four less-skilled workers for twelve dollars per hour with work benefits when just one skilled worker can be hired for fifty dollars per hour to complete same tasks? One 1990 survey of economists revealed 80 percent agreement with the statement that increasing the minimum wage increases unemployment among the youth and low-skilled. Without minimum wage restrictions, restaurants, say, are more likely to hire people for entry-level positions; this gives them important job experience, the opportunity to create a track record of good work habits, helps them build a résumé, and enables them to step into a better opportunity a year or two later. Such entry-level jobs help get people onto the employment ladder.[1]

Furthermore, justice in the workplace—giving to each person what is due—includes equal or fair treatment and stands in opposition to favor-

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itism. "What good is nepotism if you can't keep it in the family?" the joke goes. Yet justice does not permit an employer to give one person greater or less benefit for unfair reasons—solely on the basis of family, friendship, race or sex. While workers are worthy of their wages, this does not mean padding pockets through pay raises while the company and its workers suffer as a result.

In addition to Paul's letters, Old Testament teaching concerning the owner's responsibilities throws light on the responsibilities of management. God opposes taking advantage of the vulnerable. Though God permits servitude, he opposes the practice of chattel slavery (Deut 24:14; Jer 34:8-20; Ezek 27:13; 1 Tim 1:9-10; Rev 18:11-13). The Mosaic law regulated abuses in order to protect the destitute so that they would not sell themselves into servitude, as we note below. Servants were not to be harmed, their time in servitude was limited, and they were to be given material goods to start their debt-free life (Deut 15:10-17). Not all these laws are applicable for our day, of course, but principles embedded in the regulations should prove instructive.

Most of the admonitions were for the master or employer, and this is certainly appropriate for any relationship in which one party is strong, the other weak. Management must not defraud, oppress or harm, and must pay fair wages on time (Lev 19:13; 25:43; Deut 24:14-15; Prov 22:16; Mal 3:5; Mt 10:10; Lk 10:7; Rom 4:4; 1 Tim 5:18; Jas 5:4). The established rest day must be given (Ex 20:9-11; 23:12; 34:21; Deut 5:14; 15:18). Management must not despise the cause of the employee (Job 31:13), but should reward and pay him well (Prov 17:2; 27:18; Jer 22:13). In fact, the master was to treat his servant as a son (Prov 29:21).

Responsibilities of labor. Employees, for their part, are not to deceive or be violent (Zeph 1:9; Lk 16:10-11). They are to honor their employers (Mal 1:6; 1 Tim 6:1), be faithful (Mt 24:45-47; Lk 12:35-39; 16:10; 1 Cor 4:2; Tit 2:9-10), and be patient and follow orders (Eph 6:5; Col 3:22; Tit 2:9; 1 Pet 2:18), even when the employer doesn't deserve it (1 Pet 2:18-20). They are to work hard and not be lazy (1 Thess 4:11-12; 2 Thess 3:7).

Let us speak plainly about the implications of this teaching. The employer who pays less than a fair wage is stealing from the worker. The

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worker who carelessly arrives late and wastes time with small talk, inattentive work, long breaks, or daydreaming is a thief. And both sin against God, their true employer.

Collective bargaining. What happens when management—often with significant economic power—fails to live up to its responsibilities? Labor has the recourse of protection by a higher authority (government), collective bargaining, and, where relevant, the correctives of the supply-and-demand market.

Although God is the ultimate authority, who will one day settle all accounts, governments typically represent the highest temporal power at present. That said, large corporations, in addition to providing employment, could potentially wield power to dramatically affect the economic life of a nation. Yet under enlightened—often democratic—governments, the laborer is normally protected by safety standards, improving working conditions, nondiscrimination and basic rights before the law (e.g., property, legal recourse).

Often the natural correctives of the free market, through competition and wealth creation, can bring about positive changes for the worker and in the workplace. Even while Karl Marx was using outdated information about working conditions in British factories, much self-correcting and many worker reforms were already taking place without the help of a centralized government.[2] But should unions of teachers, sanitation workers, police or firefighters, who are supported at taxpayer expense, have the right to strike for higher wages and benefits when "management" cannot be counted on for "fairness and justice in humility, from the heart"? And does a Christian have the right to strike?

Some Christians oppose such unions since this is an "unequal yoke" with unbelievers (2 Cor 6:14–7:1). To some degree, being united with unbelievers is inevitable in a fallen world (Jn 17:15-18; 1 Cor 5:10), and being unequally yoked has to do with spiritual defilement, not with contracting or associating with unbelievers in ordinary this-worldly matters.

The benefits of some union workers—say, auto workers—should not be funded by taxpayer dollars, as this is simply bad business practice. Such businesses should be sustained because they are able to fairly compete in

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the free market, which helps keep companies innovative and attentive to the interests of customers; otherwise, businesses stagnate and die.

When it comes to sanitation workers and firefighters, for instance, resisting established corporate injustice may be justified, though not with force, as employers' lives rarely face harm on the job. The threat of a strike to force negotiation may be justified in the face of unredressed grievances. On the other hand, unions should not coerce workers who are content with their wages and benefits. "Big labor" can often become as corrupt as the "big management" under criticism. Of course, the freedom to assemble ("unions") is a right, and such groups can freely petition the government to make reforms.

However, collective bargaining is different; it is a privilege—namely, the granting of one interest group special status and access to the decision-making process, as the 1969 *Atkins v. City of Charlotte* case concluded. On the other hand, should people be *forced* into unions? Is it not their right to refuse? Must union members be forced to pay dues—typically taken out of their paychecks—when those monies are channeled toward causes with which they fundamentally disagree, such as supporting one political candidate over another? Today, a union's power is not so much in its ability to strike, which was a signal failure in 1981, when the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) fired striking air traffic controllers and hired new ones. Rather, their energies had been directed toward preserving their jobs and preventing replacement workers from being hired.

Historically speaking, unions in America had their place to improve conditions and challenge corruption, but once labor achieved power, it too proved corrupt. As unions typically operate in today's world, there seems little justification for unionization.

Scripture demands justice and fairness from management, and the law of love would press a manager or owner toward providing fair wages and, where possible, basic benefits—while making the business succeed for the sake of both the employees and owners. Profits for stockholders or management must be in line with benefits for employees. Labor, in like manner, may demand justice and fairness but should not coerce other benefits, especially when they might jeopardize the company's—or government's—welfare.

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Excursus: Slavery in Scripture

In a book on biblical ethics, we should address the commonly raised question about the Bible's alleged endorsement of slavery.

1. Critics commonly associate all mention of slavery in Israel with more recent modern abuses, particularly antebellum slavery in the American South. This is inaccurate. Servitude in Israel was more like contracted *indentured servitude,* common in colonial America, for instance: British citizens would work for seven years to pay for their passage to the New World, after which they could move about freely as citizens.

2. Israelite servitude came about through extreme poverty—not through kidnapping, a capital offense (Ex 21:16; cf. Deut 24:7).

   The Hebrew term for servant or slave (*'ebed*) is a neutral word that denotes a dependency relationship rather than degradation, property ownership or oppression. It can often function as an honorific title. For example, after their deaths both Moses and Joshua are called "the servant [*'ebed*] of the LORD" (Deut 34:5; Josh 1:1; 24:29). The book of Exodus portrays the Israelites as moving from dependency on Pharaoh to a position of dependency on God as his "servants" in the wilderness. God demands that Pharaoh let the Israelites go; they are called Pharaoh's "servants/slaves" in Exodus 5:15-16—just as the Egyptians themselves are called Pharaoh's "servants/slaves" in 5:21! So Israel is going from one state of servitude or dependence to another (Ex 4:23; 7:16; 8:1, 20; 9:1, 13; 10:3, 7, 8, 11, 24, 26). They are leaving oppressive servitude in Egypt to serve God in the wilderness.[3]

3. Israelite servitude was entered into *voluntarily* and *temporarily.* One "sells himself" (Lev 25:47) or parcels out family members to clan homes (Ex 21:7) to live and be cared for under their roof. Of course, a kinsman could buy out or "redeem" a person from debt, or the debt would be eradicated and land would revert to the original owner in the fiftieth Jubilee year.[4]

4. Lifelong servitude was not permitted, unless voluntarily entered into (Ex 21:5). The status of Israelite servants was unique in the

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ancient Near East: "Hebrew has no vocabulary of slavery, only of servanthood."[5]

5. Israel had laws to mitigate poverty—and thus servitude—and controls to prevent institutionalizing it; these included gleaning laws, six-year service limits, the year of Jubilee, warnings to look out for "the stranger, the orphan, and the widow who are in your midst" (Deut 16:11), no-interest loans (Ex 22:25), commands to lend freely to the poor (Deut 15:7-8) and so on.

6. Servants in Israel were to be treated as persons, not property, which is in keeping with the image of God in all people (Gen 1:27; cf. Job 31:13-15). As the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* puts it, "We have in the Bible the first appeals in world literature to treat slaves as human beings for their own sake and not just in the interests of their masters."[6]

7. Unlike the antebellum South, injured servants were to be released (Ex 21:26-27). If a "master" killed his servant, then he could be executed (Ex 21:20). The servant was to be treated as a human being, not as property. Now if the servant died a day or two later, this suggests he had no murderous intent. Here, the context is one of accidental injury and paying the medical bills for another's recovery (Ex 21:18-19); the employer's paying a medical "fee" ("that is his fee/silver") for his servant's injuries suggests a spirit of good will (Ex 21:20-21).

8. In contrast to the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi, foreign runaway slaves were not to be returned to their harsh masters (on pain of death) but were to settle safely within Israel's cities (Deut 23:15-16).

9. If a male and female servant marry—and even have children—while under the six-year contract, they must complete it (Ex 23:2-6). The male or female servant—Mosaic case law was not gender specific—who completed his contract could leave. However, as in the army, marriage does not cancel a contract. The husband, say, could leave so that he can earn his own way without family, or he could try to buy out his family while sustaining himself. But given these alternatives, it would often make better sense to permanently attach himself to his live-in employer and be with his family: "perhaps many people would be rea-

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sonably happy to settle for being long-term or lifelong servants. Servants do count as part of the family. . . . one can even imagine people who started off as debt servants volunteering to become permanent servants because they love their master and his household (cp. Deut 15:16-17)."[7]

10. Leviticus 25 seems to allow a person to

> acquire [*qānāh*] male and female slaves from the pagan nations that are around you. . . . Then, too, it is out of the sons of the sojourners [*tôšābîm*] who live as aliens [*gērîm*] among you that you may gain acquisition, and out of their families who are with you, whom they will have produced in your land; they also may become your possession. You may even bequeath them to your sons after you, to receive as a possession; you can use them as permanent slaves. (Lev 25:44-46)

How does this fit in with what we've already seen? A few responses are in order:

- Earlier in Leviticus, Israel was commanded to love the stranger (*gēr*) in the land just as one loved the native (Lev 19:33-34). Such passages set a tone for some of the more difficult-to-interpret texts.
- The Israelites were to remember that they too had been strangers (*gērîm*) in the land of Egypt (Ex 22:21; 23:9; etc.), and Israel's laws sought to protect from abuse not only Israelites in servitude but also strangers in the land (Ex 21:20-21, 26-27; Deut 23:15-16).
- The verb "acquire" (*qānāh*) does not necessitate treatment as property (think of sports team "owners" who "sell" players): Eve had "gotten" a child (Gen 4:1); God is "possessor" of the universe (Gen 14:19); Boaz "acquired" Ruth as a wife (Ruth 4:10) in a legal transaction.
- Earlier in Leviticus 25, we see an interesting repetition of the couplet "stranger" (*gēr*) and "sojourner" (*tôšāb*). Israelites themselves are "*sojourners* and *aliens* with [God]" (Lev 25:23); Israel is to sustain a poor countryman "like a *stranger* or a *sojourner,* that he

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may live with you" (Lev 25:35); and it was possible that "the means of a *stranger* or of a *sojourner* with you becomes sufficient" (Lev 25:47).

The text indicates that the land of Israel was a place of opportunity for outsiders so that they could even hire Israelites, though it was to be avoided. Further, we are told that Israelites "may" acquire "slaves"—not that they "must." But in light of Leviticus 25's context and in consideration of other relevant passages, why couldn't the conditions for acquiring foreign "slaves" be *identical* to acquiring Israelite servants—namely, *extreme poverty and voluntarily attaching themselves to an Israelite household*? And again, couldn't the conditions for a stranger staying permanently in an Israelite home (and into the next generation) be *identical* to an Israelite's doing so? Indeed, the word *permanent(ly)* (*'ôlām*) is identical in Exodus 21:6 (the Hebrew servant) and Leviticus 25:46 (the foreign "slave"). In both cases they could leave the state of servitude and become persons of means. Walter Kaiser says that, in principle, all persons in servitude within Israel could be released, unless they had committed a crime.[8]

- In Israel's history, foreign servants could become elevated and apparently fully equal to Israelite citizens. For instance, Caleb's descendant Sheshan ended up giving his Egyptian servant Jarha to his daughter in marriage, and they had a child, Attai (1 Chron 2:34-35).
- Israel was required to give oppressed foreign runaway slaves protection within her borders (Deut 23:15-16). Surely, this text is no basis for lesser treatment (Ex 21:16; Deut 24:7). Also, non-Israelites weren't to acquire land in Israel; so this meant landless foreigners didn't have much choice but to attach themselves to Israelite households as servants.

11. As for the New Testament, we have Roman chattel (property) slavery, not Mosaic servitude with dignity and rights. Some commonly assert: "Jesus never condemned slavery." But consider Jesus' very own mission

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statement. Jesus' mission opposed all oppression, including treating slaves as property; after all, he came to release captives and free the oppressed (Lk 4:18). In the epistles Paul said there is "neither slave nor free" in Christ (Gal 3:28), and he encouraged slaves to find their freedom if possible (1 Cor 7:21). In addition, masters and slaves in Paul's congregations were exhorted to "greet one another with a holy kiss" (1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Thess 5:26). Paul also gives this exhortation in Romans 16:16, whose context mentions Andronicus and Urbanus—believing Romans with typical slave names who also shared in the gospel work of Paul as fellow-workers and fellow-prisoners in the gospel (Rom 16:7, 9). This "holy kiss" in the family of God was a radical picture of equality; that is, the believer's class or status—whether slave or free—did not undermine her fundamental position as a brother or sister in Christ. Furthermore, believing masters and slaves who lived in the same household would share the Lord's Supper together—a radical statement of equality. This would be the beginning of the undoing of Roman slavery, which actually occurred as the result of the Christian faith spreading throughout Europe.

Paul condemns "slave traders" (1 Tim 1:9-10), and John condemns "Babylon" (ancient Rome; cf. 1 Pet 5:13) for her trafficking in humans as cargo ("bodies and souls of humans"—or "bodies, that is, the souls of humans"); the Romans traded them as they did spices, oil and cattle (Rev 18:11-13; cf. Ezek. 27:13, where ancient Tyre had done the same).

12. What of Onesimus? Wasn't he a runaway slave whom Paul sent back to his master? Wasn't Paul sending the wrong message about slavery by doing this? As it turns out, the "fugitive-slave hypothesis" actually had quite a late start, dating back to the church father John Chrysostom (A.D. 347–407). Furthermore, the epistle contains no "flight" verbs, as though Onesimus had suddenly gone AWOL on Philemon. And Paul revealed no hint of fear that Philemon would brutally treat a returning Onesimus, as Roman masters typically did when their runaway slaves were caught.

    It has been plausibly suggested that Onesimus and Philemon were *estranged Christian brothers—perhaps even biological brothers.*[9] Paul ex-

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horted Philemon not to receive Onesimus as a slave, whose status in Roman society meant alienation and dishonor; rather, Onesimus was to be welcomed as a beloved brother: "that you might have him back forever—*no longer as a slave, but* better than a slave, *as a dear brother.* He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord" (Philem 1:15-16 NIV). Notice, too, the similar-sounding language in Galatians 4:7: "Therefore you are *no longer a slave, but a son;* and if a son, then an heir through God." This may shed further light on how to interpret the epistle of Philemon: Paul wanted to help heal the rift so that Onesimus (*not* an actual slave) would be received back as *a beloved brother in the Lord*—not even simply as a biological brother. To do so would be to follow God's own example in receiving us as *sons* and *daughters* rather than *slaves.*

Work and Leisure

We have considered the topic of *sloth* in chapter eight. Here we look at work—and overwork—as well as accountability for the use of leisure time.

Work. To the Greek mind, labor was undignified—or worse. According to the biblical authors, work is part of our calling as humans—to rule over creation (Gen 1:26, 28; 2:15; cf. Ps 8). About gospel ministry, Paul said, "we are God's fellow workers" (1 Cor 3:9). Human work is to be a sacred cooperation with the living Creator. As the hymn writer put it, "We plow the fields, and scatter the good seed on the land, but it is fed and watered by God's almighty hand."

From a biblical point of view, work has three purposes—related to God, others and self. John Stott defined it this way: "Work is the expenditure of energy (manual or mental or both) in the service of others, which brings fulfillment to the worker, benefit to the community, and glory to God."[10] Our work matters to *God*—and even the most mundane activities can honor God (1 Cor 10:31; Col 3:23). God has given us abilities, opportunities and inclinations by which we can glorify him, offering up our work as a spiritual sacrifice to him (cf. Rom 12:1-2). Our work should also help *others,* say, in making safe and truly useful products rather than dangerous or frivolous ones—and so that we can have goods to help those in need

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(Eph 4:28). And laborers *themselves* can often find satisfaction in working hard, using their abilities and seeing the fruit of their labors. Work is a privilege, which contributes to a proper sense of self-respect. Of course, job satisfaction is secondary to living a faithful, Christlike life in the workplace and to supplying for the material needs of oneself and one's family.[11]

God gifted the craftsman Bezalel with artistic skills to work on the tabernacle (Ex 31:1-6; 35:30-35). Jesus told soldiers and tax-gatherers not to leave their work, but to work honestly and with integrity (Lk 3:12-14). For the Christian, there is no "secular" work; it is all sacred. We have a calling to do our work with industriousness and excellence. God the Father himself expressed that he was "well-pleased" with his son Jesus, who had been a wood craftsman even *before* he began his public ministry (Mt 3:17). In the movie *Chariots of Fire,* Eric Liddell, called to be a missionary to China, was also an exceptional runner who had been training for the 1924 Olympics. He told his sister, "I believe God made me for a purpose—for China. But he also made me fast, and when I run, I feel his pleasure."

However, what one does to earn a living—the task of shining shoes at an airport or of a Dalit's sweeping human excrement in Calcutta's streets—should not be confused with one's divine calling, as though these tasks are somehow what God designed a person to do. And even Paul's making of tents to sustain himself at times was not his calling; Christ had called him to the more fundamental task of evangelizing the Gentiles. Ultimately, one's purpose and calling are to fellowship with God and become more like Christ, and this can be achieved through our work, even if our work is not as fulfilling as we would like it to be.

It is every believer's calling or vocation to live a Christlike life in the workplace. We need to recover the word *vocation* in our day. Indeed, the terms *occupation* and *profession* remove the element of God's approval and blessing of work—that work is a sacred gift that is bound up with our priestly calling. The prayer of Psalm 90:17 is fitting: "May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us; establish the work of our hands for us—yes, establish the work of our hands" (NIV).

The "Protestant work ethic." German social historian Max Weber's major work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* draws par-

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ticular attention to Calvin's understanding of predestination. He argues that the "spirit of capitalism"—though it existed before this time—came to full flowering with the emphasis on demonstrating that one was part of the elect by doing "good works." This included hard work and self-discipline, which issue forth in the accumulation of wealth, which is morally permissible so long as it does not result in a life of luxury and idleness. Part of the human *calling*—a strong emphasis of the Reformers—is to work and find fulfillment in that work.

The so-called Protestant work ethic has come under criticism. Is this truly "Protestant"? Didn't Augustine's work influence this thinking? Whatever the source, northern Europeans and American Protestants have tended to hold to a serious work ethic. So influential has the connection between Protestantism and a strong work ethic been that noted British historian Niall Ferguson calls this work ethic one of the six "killer apps" that propelled the West forward as a civilization—along with civilizational competition, science, modern medicine, property rights and a free market. Though an atheist, Ferguson claims that the decline in religion in Europe has led to Europeans becoming the "idlers of the world"—and that China's increasingly strong work ethic has been shaped by Protestantism in the West.[12]

Although we address the question of play and leisure below, some feel guilty when they relax. Now, the growing widespread affluence in the world has made leisure increasingly possible. In the early 1900s in America, the average worker put in a sixty-six-hour week; today such people are designated "workaholics." If such an approach to work is denigrated as "workaholism," perhaps Jesus himself is the most guilty (Mk 3:20-21) along with Paul (1 Thess 2:8; 2 Thess 3:8). As we see it, to work intensely, to work long hours, to enjoy one's work, cannot, on biblical grounds, be wrong, so long as one is not neglecting other obligations or failing to attend to one's health.

Labor should not harm the worker, whether physically, morally, psychologically or spiritually. Certain lines of much-needed work—police officers, psychiatrists, air traffic controllers, soldiers, for instance—require recovery time from high-stress situations. That said, research has consistently demonstrated that the *amount* of work is less the culprit in work-related health

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problems than one's *attitude* about that work. Yet to work compulsively or with a savior complex, as though the universe revolves around my work, is idolatrous. To neglect other responsibilities or to work from a spirit of pride or avarice is sinful and calls for repentance. And, we should add, regardless of the economic or political system under which they work, Christians can fulfill their vocation so long as it brings glory to God and benefits others.

Leisure and Play

God is a God of joy and pleasure, and leisure is a gift to be rightly used. The Bible is full of feasts and celebrations to enjoy (Neh 8:14-18; Lev 23; Esther 9:17, 19). Jesus attended the wedding feast of Cana (Jn 2), and he was accused of being a glutton and a drunkard—something of a "party animal"—as he enjoyed table fellowship with sinners. In the final restoration of God's people, "the city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there" (Zech 8:5 NIV).

Ah, leisure time! As more are rising out of poverty in this world, more are coming to enjoy what was once granted only to the privileged few in our world. Yet leisure is not morally innocent; like work, it should be engaged in to the glory of God. Leisure is a trust to be invested in nurture of family, service to the church, ministry to the needs of others, and replenishing one's own physical, psychic and spiritual resources.

However, play with no end in view is unbiblical; it should be to God's glory, and it should be intentional rather than mindless. Think about how many squander their time on video games, surfing the internet, or watching endless hours of television. Television or video games are not wrong in themselves, but these can be instruments of sloth if we are not attentive. The average child ages eight to eighteen sits for 7.5 hours in front of an entertainment screen each day (videos, TV, movies, video games, Internet entertainment). Just as we can idolize work, we can also idolize pleasure—and become spiritually, relationally and psychologically harmed as a result.[13]

Further Reading

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Economic Systems, Poverty, Wealth and Theft

Economic Systems

Though there have been various economic systems throughout history, two have vied for dominance in recent history up to the present: capitalism and socialism. Because any economic system is intertwined with some political system (e.g., capitalism in repressive "communist" China or socialism in democratic Sweden), the two are easily confused. But for our present consideration of integrity in using money, it is important to separate the two, dealing with the economic rather than the political system. The question of political systems will be considered in part ten, "Christians and Society."

Capitalism versus socialism. Capitalism is an economic system in which investment in and ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange of wealth is made and maintained by private individuals or corporations. The central emphasis of capitalism is wealth creation. Socialism involves state control over the means of production. Advocates of capitalism seem to dominate American evangelical thought; advocates of socialism dominate evangelical thought in most of the rest of the world, but increasingly in the United States (e.g., Jim Wallis, Tony Campolo).

One advocate of socialism writes that capitalism "promotes individualism, competition, and profit-making with little or no regard for social costs. It puts profits and private gain before social services and human needs. As such, it is an unjust system which should be replaced."[1] Orlando

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Costas, who before his death in 1988 was dean of Andover Newton Theological School, embraced socialism wholeheartedly, contending that to stand by the poor is to support socialism:

> The Spirit will lead us to recognize Christ in the poor and the really oppressed, because Christ stands alongside of them. . . . Once you stand by them, I see no other option but socialism. These people are where they are because of . . . a "civilized" process which has excelled in domination, controlling people, exploiting their resources, and using their cheap labor. Capitalism is not something that can be transformed and reformed. The very root of capitalism is the process of enslaving people, exploiting their resources. . . . The only alternative I know to capitalism is to reverse the whole thing and begin a proper distribution of the wealth.[2]

George Gilder, author of *Wealth and Poverty,* sees things somewhat differently. He notes that government social programs "that are allegedly charitable are in fact profoundly destructive. . . . Capitalism is the economic system that is consonant with Christianity."[3]

What do we say to these fervently held and mutually exclusive viewpoints? Here we authors have a different take on this question.

McQuilkin's view. Perhaps the brilliant French philosopher Jacques Ellul comes closest to the truth in pronouncing a pox on both their houses:

> Capitalism has progressively subordinated all of life—individual and collective—to money. Money has become the criterion for judging man and his activity. One by one the state, the legal system, art, and the churches have submitted to the power of money. . . . We must recognize the truth in Karl Marx's observation that money, in the capitalist system, leads to alienation.[4]

Does socialism, then, look more attractive? Socialism rightly attacks capitalism for subordinating man to money, for its unjust economic structures. Socialism takes for its motto "To each according to his deeds," which in communism becomes "To each according to his needs."

> But how does socialism plan to achieve its goals? First, by strictly limiting human life to work, to economic activity. . . . This is precisely the source of real alienation—not the subservience of *being* to *personal having,* but the

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> subservience of *being* to *doing* and to *collective having*. . . . The differences between systems look small next to such similarity.[5]

Ellul's view is that Scripture doesn't furnish us with criteria for accepting one view over another; we will have to appeal to something else.

I concur with Ellul that the data of Scripture cannot be bent to validate any known economic system. On the other hand, the principles of Scripture can and must be constantly applied by thoughtful Christians to correct the wrongs of the system under which they live. Actually this may have happened in the middle years of the century in which almost all capitalistic nations yielded to the pressure of human need and legislated social welfare. At the same time almost all socialistic regimes yielded to the pressures of human nature to make room for some private enterprise and marketplace economics.

The advocate of a free market economic system emphasizes freedom and the right to private property, while those who promote a controlled market economy for the welfare of all citizens emphasize justice, fairness and equality. Capitalism is for freedom; socialism is for equality. Yet neither economic freedom nor equality is very pronounced in Scripture.

True, "freedom" is important in Scripture, but the freedom advocated, especially in the New Testament, is primarily spiritual and only minimally political. Economic freedom to make unlimited amounts of money is not presented in Scripture at all; the only *economic* freedom addressed is freedom from poverty and oppression. Legislation can make citizens free to accumulate, but freedom to do so does not make it happen. "Economic freedom" can mean freedom to get (capitalism) or freedom to subsist (socialism). Since freedom to get always works to the advantage of the smart, ruthless or economically powerful, it is only proper that the biblical emphasis should be on protecting the weak and less fortunate.

Whose freedom is more violated—a wealthy person prohibited from becoming more wealthy (or compelled to become less wealthy) or a poor person who is trapped in poverty? Who is in greater bondage—the one who has and is prohibited from getting more, or the one who has not and is prohibited by circumstances from getting at all? On which kind of freedom does the Bible lay emphasis?

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Since Scripture is strong on setting free those oppressed economically, the crucial question becomes whether the right of private property in Scripture is the right to unlimited accumulation and possession. The law of Jubilee (Lev 25) clearly presents strict limitations to permanent accumulation on the part of the strong at the expense of the weak or unfortunate. The concept of taxation also clearly sets limits. So it would seem impossible, on biblical grounds, to make the right of private property an unlimited right.

Though it is difficult to prove from Scripture that civil government must guarantee the right to accumulate unlimited wealth, it is replete with strong teaching on the obligation of a society to protect the oppressed, provide for the poor, clothe the naked (Ps 82:3-4; Is 58:6-10; Amos 2:6-7; Mt 25:41-43).

The Bible has a great deal more to say to the capitalist about how his behavior must be modified than it does to the socialist. But since an economic *system* cannot be imposed without political sanctions, and since human beings are radically self-oriented, thus subverting any economic system, I conclude that neither system has a biblical mandate for imposition. Either will founder on the shoals of human nature.

Therefore, the Christian in either system should work toward change to bring it increasingly into conformity with the great biblical principles of justice and mercy. If freedom can be combined with these far more basic concepts, all the better. Perhaps, in a fallen society, the freedom won through the painful balancing of the rights of one group against those of another is the only hope for some measure of justice.

Copan's view. The United Nations' "State of the Future" (2007) begins: "People around the world are becoming healthier, wealthier, better educated, more peaceful, and increasingly connected, and they are living longer." *Why* are people generally wealthier? Which system better helps the poor come out of poverty? Two centuries' worth of economic data are in, and the results are worth noting. The only cases where the world's masses have escaped grinding poverty—most accurately measured by increased income *per person*—is through the twin conditions of free markets and the enforcement of the rule of law (e.g., property rights and equality

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before the law).[6] Just go to the Gapminder website (gapminder.org) to see these trends in any nation from 1800 to the present.

History reveals something else: socialist-style government redistribution of wealth at home and abroad has failed to help, and has even harmed, the poor—in addition to bloating the government. In 1979, black economist Walter Williams wrote that the government's 250 billion dollars spent that year on helping "the poor" was simply wasteful and mismanaged—not to mention that it created a dependent underclass. If simply distributed directly and equally to the "poor," each person would have received an astonishing annual payment of $34,000. Most welfare money never reaches the recipients since bureaucratic agencies siphon off first.[7]

In 1996, Democratic president Bill Clinton—with the majority-Republican Congress—passed the welfare reform legislation. After ten years of very positive results, he wrote about it in the *New York Times:*

> In the past decade, welfare rolls have dropped substantially, from 12.2 million in 1996 to 4.5 million today [in 2006]. At the same time, caseloads declined by 54 percent. Sixty percent of mothers who left welfare found work, far surpassing predictions of experts. Through the Welfare to Work Partnership, which my administration started to speed the transition to employment, more than 20,000 businesses hired 1.1 million former welfare recipients. Welfare reform has proved a great success, and I am grateful to the Democrats and Republicans who had the courage to work together to take bold action.[8]

And the trillions of Western-aid dollars to non-Western governments during the twentieth century did nothing to alleviate poverty, but only created dependency and fed corruption. Economist Thomas Sowell writes: "The lot of the poor improves through the ability to create wealth. If we compare the track record of socialism and capitalism, the latter wins hands-down in terms of improving the lot of the poor."[9] I readily recognize that the *motive* of helping the poor is laudable, but *how* we help the poor is crucial: it can harm or help.

After years of advocating for "aid" to Africa, U2 singer Bono discovered that entrepreneurship, free enterprise and wealth creation—not "aid"—are what bring people out of poverty. He told a Georgetown University au-

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dience in November 2012: "But commerce is real. That's what you're about here. It's real. Aid is just a stop gap. Commerce, entrepreneurial capitalism takes more people out of poverty than aid; of course, we know that."[10]

The "growing disparity" between rich and poor is beside the point. Actually *both* rich and poor are getting richer. In free markets, *all* benefit, even if Bill Gates has far more material assets than I do—and Gates is responsible before God to use his money wisely. No one denies that government should provide safety nets—but not hammocks!—for the truly needy. But before government welfare, churches and Christian volunteer organizations did a much better job of helping the poor and connecting them to family support; they should step forward to do what they can rather than leaving this to the government.[11] Yet the government does not create *wealth*; indeed, government intervention can ruin the economy, which it did during the Great Depression. Unemployment had even dropped *after* the stock market crash of 1929 (from 9 to 6.3 percent). But with the government-imposed Smoot-Hawley tariffs taking effect, it jumped six months later to double digits and then didn't dropped below 20 percent for thirty-five months.[12] Rather than government intervention, government policies should allow for equal *opportunities* for wealth creation.

Some might ask, isn't the free market driven by greed? Well, there are certainly free market capitalists who are greedy—just as there are many people who eat food who are gluttons! Just as food should be distinguished from gluttony, the free market should be distinguished from greed. Also, critics fail to differentiate between *selfishness* (which is bad) and *self-interest* (which can be quite appropriate). A "greed-is-good" capitalism (selfishness) is clearly opposed to a biblical ethic, but a principled self-interest is not. Caring for oneself and one's family expresses *proper* self-interest (Eph 5:29; 1 Tim 5:8). A baker sells bread to support his family from the profits, yet he provides goods so his customers can feed themselves and their families. *Both* parties are *appropriately* self-interested. This exchange of goods creates a win-win situation—not a win-lose or lose-lose situation. Free enterprise and profit through wealth creation are not themselves the problem. "Concerned socialism" versus "greedy capitalism" is a false dichotomy that typically ignores or scorns legitimate self-interest. And aren't

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there plenty of socialist-minded people who are greedy for *political* power?

Even the year of Jubilee (Lev 25) is not a case of wealth redistribution; it functions more like our bankruptcy laws do, enabling a person to begin again after catastrophic loss. It upholds preserving "private property" (though the land ultimately belongs to God), and it does not apply to aliens and sojourners living in Israel.

Socialism and capitalism are not equal when it comes to helping the poor: despite fallen human nature, the simple fact is that the free market has helped bring people out of poverty whereas socialism has not.

McQuilkin and Copan. Economic systems aside, we both agree that the church has an obligation to the poor in ways that do not keep them dependent on others but that all able-bodied persons can work with their hands so that they can share with those who do not (Eph 4:28). The gospel calls us to trust in our heavenly Father rather than finding security in earthly treasures; to invest in kingdom priorities that will not pass away; to care for the needy especially within the Christian community, but also for those outside; to reject greed, opulence, indulgence; to care for natural resources and preserve them for future generations. Moreover, the power of the gospel can bring transformation and redemptive uplift and transformed attitudes toward money. Economic systems do not redeem.

Moreover, greed has different manifestations, including both economic greed and political greed; amoral capitalists can be greedy for money while amoral socialists can be greedy for political power.[13] The Gospels indicate that there are more dangers associated with wealth than with poverty. Indeed, abject poverty is a condition in which people will more likely see their need for God—even though we ought to be concerned about helping the poor.

The selfish orientation toward consumerism and accumulation—tearing down old barns to build new ones for the sake of self-indulgence (Lk 12:16-21)—is idolatrous, alienating and soul-destroying. For the free market to work properly, it must be undergirded by crucial moral commitments: hard work, trust, industry, honesty, equality before the law and equal opportunity to improve one's lot.

Interest. Though profit through trade is more basic to capitalism,

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Scripture speaks more directly to the question of interest on loans. So let us consider first the question of capital accumulated through lending and borrowing money at interest—an indispensable element of modern capitalism. Large sums of money are needed for major manufacturing or marketing efforts. In the socialistic system these funds may be accumulated through taxation, but in a private enterprise system it is normally necessary to borrow funds to "capitalize" an enterprise. Even wealthy people cannot normally afford such investment; so money is accumulated by borrowing from many people through the medium of giving them part ownership (stock) in the corporation, or through the intermediary of a bank or insurance company that has already accumulated large sums of money through borrowing. People will not ordinarily invest in an enterprise without hope of gain; so the corporation must return, in the form of profits or interest, benefits to the lender.

The Bible consistently speaks against lending money at interest (Ex 22:25-27; Lev 25:37; Ps 15:5; Prov 28:8; Ezek 18:8-9, 13, 17; 22:12). To complicate matters, Deuteronomy 23:20 forbids charging interest to a fellow Israelite; however, Israelites "may charge interest to a foreigner." Should Christians, say, not charge interest to Christians but do so for non-Christians?

The debt-interest situation in Israel, however, was quite *distinct* from ours today. In ancient Israel, loans were commonly made to relieve economic distress (Ex 22:24, 25). Today, a bank might give loans at interest to a person who wants to start a business; credit card companies charge interest; banks make loans for home purchases at interest. But the interest here is not to help destitute people but to allow businesses, which themselves take risks, to stay afloat and grow or to help individuals buy homes they would otherwise not be able to afford.

In Moses' day, charging interest was prohibited to protect the poor Israelite; Israelites were not to be in bondage to "loan sharks" who could take advantage of the financially vulnerable. The "foreigner" (*nokrî*), however, was likely a businessperson seeking to engage in commerce and was not destitute; so to charge interest to him was no problem. Keep in mind that Israel was to care for the vulnerable in the land, including the "alien" and the "stranger." Walter Kaiser writes that legislation on interest was "not to

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stifle business or the practice of corporate laws as we know them today. Its aim was mainly to protect the poor. The would-be creditor should not take advantage of the economic hardship that had forced his 'brother' . . . to seek a loan."[14]

In general, we do not view charging interest in modern societies as oppressive or inherently evil. The enduring point from the law of Moses is not to take advantage of the financially vulnerable. Whereas the New Testament says nothing about charging interest, its heartbeat reinforces the ancient injunctions in our obligation to assist the poor or aid fellow believers.

Debt. The New Testament does speak of indebtedness: "Owe no one anything, except to love one another" (Rom 13:8 RSV). This does not prohibit going into debt, say, to pay for a house in manageable increments. Rather, Paul stresses that love is an obligation, not an option. We owe love because we have freely received it (Mt 10:8).

We find no clear-cut biblical teaching outlawing any and all debt. Financial adviser Larry Burkett offers this clarification: "The scriptural definition of debt is the inability to meet obligations agreed upon. In other words, when a person buys something on credit terms, that is not necessarily a debt, it is a contract. But, when the terms of that contract are violated, scriptural debt occurs."[15] So Christians must get out of debt when any of the following conditions applies:

- You owe money for goods or services.
- The value of your unsecured liabilities exceeds total assets (i.e., you would have a negative balance if you cashed out).
- Your spending habits (e.g., credit card debt) are preventing your family's needs (not wants) from being met—habits that create anxiety.[16]

One appalling kind of debt default is student loans: one out of four college graduates do not pay off their student loans, nor do most of them even plan to do so—although they will purchase the latest computer, communication and entertainment technologies. This displays a serious lack of integrity—a failure to be people of their word and an abdication of personal responsibility (Ps 15:4).

Cosigning. Avoiding avoidable debt is biblical (Prov 11:15; 22:7, 26), and

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the Bible speaks strongly against taking the risk of cosigning—or "giving a pledge" or "putting up security"—for a neighbor or stranger (Prov 6:1-5; 11:15; 17:8; 22:26-27). It is not sinful to lend: "Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you" (Mt 5:42). Of course, this does not mean we literally give anything to whoever asks—say, a homeless person with alcohol on his breath. Jesus *himself* did not give to everyone who asked of him (Mk 8:11-12; 10:35-40; Lk 12:13-15). Jesus' point is that if you are trying to decide between generosity and withholding, choose generosity—the better way. Yet Jesus' disciples are to be shrewd and wise with their resources (Lk 16:1-10), and for a person to put her name to a stranger's or even a friend's contract is unwise and can lead to financial ruin for herself and her family.

From this brief overview of the very limited biblical data on the subject, we conclude that the Bible does not prohibit profit-making or charging modest and fair interest rates, that it is prudent to avoid borrowing and lending when possible, that it is permissible to borrow or lend at interest so long as the rate is not exorbitant or oppressive, that cosigning is to be avoided, and that generous giving to those in need is a better way.

Personal Integrity and Bankruptcy

We live in a cheating age. In widely available surveys, 75–98 percent of persons polled acknowledged cheating in high school. This does not bode well for personal integrity when it comes to economic systems, which demand honesty, completely free from any form of cheating, stealing or taking advantage of others. Below are temptations that come with our particular economic system.

Bankruptcy. Here we may distinguish between a fraudulent bankruptcy (the result of irresponsibility such as overspending or cosigning) and a bankruptcy of desperation (despite the person's having shown personal responsibility and caution). Consider, first, the fraudulent version, which is immoral. While it may be legal to declare bankruptcy to avoid obligations, preserve personal resources and (with a clever lawyer) build a fortune that can't be touched by former creditors, it is not moral and shows a failure of integrity. While formal bankruptcy status may be necessary to

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make the transition to a better basis of relating to one's creditors, the moral person will not use it as a means of avoiding personal responsibility.

Another kind of bankruptcy is not the result of irresponsible overspending or negligence. Debt leading to bankruptcy may be incurred through calamities (e.g., loss of a job, canceled insurance, auto accident, home destroyed by a tornado or hurricane) or as a result of desperate measures taken (e.g., significant medical expenses to save a dying child or care for a chronically ill parent). This kind of persistent indebtedness may often come after having exhausted personal savings and retirement accounts. Filing for bankruptcy here is of a different order, and in certain cases a reasonable payment plan can be negotiated—or sometimes payment is even drastically reduced. This approach to debt alleviation in such dire circumstances is very much in the spirit of the Jubilee year.

A general lesson here is that God is on the side of the person whose word is reliable, who makes a commitment—as in a financial obligation—and does not go back on his word, even when it hurts (Ps 15:4). By contrast, the wicked borrow and don't pay back (Ps 37:21). The righteous person assumes responsibility for any debt he has incurred and remains responsible until the debt is paid or until death.

Litigation. "When one of you has a grievance against a brother, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? . . . But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers. . . . Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?" (1 Cor 6:1, 6-7 RSV).

In light of this clear passage, few sincere believers instigate lawsuits against fellow believers without qualms. But what if this person who *says* he is a believer does not behave like one? Paul replies, "Why not permit yourself to be defrauded rather than bring disrepute on Jesus' name?" On the other hand, since Paul makes a distinction between believers and unbelievers, litigation against an unbeliever or impersonal corporation may be legitimate so long as the law of love for neighbor (Christian *or* non-Christian) is not violated—and justice is served with integrity.

To demand money that is not justly one's own is a form of stealing that is not made moral through the instrumentality of a court. Frivolous lawsuits by opportunists—like a woman's suing McDonald's food chain after

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she spilled hot coffee on herself—are a scandal in our law courts. If every church member in the United States refused to go to court to demand "whatever I can get" when suffering some real or imagined wrong, the insurance rates for accidents and malpractice would tumble.

Anything beyond reasonable and just compensation is an attempt to defraud—an assault on the whole society, driving up the cost of products, services and insurance for everyone. It is not always wrong to demand punitive damages beyond compensation, but such cases should be clearly established as malicious or willful neglect. On the other hand, corporate lawyers, insurance companies and corporations must be fair in awarding legitimate claims, or they, in turn, will be guilty of defrauding and oppressing the weaker party.

An avaricious and corrupt society is drowning in the quagmire of litigation that its own sin has created. Success in unwarranted litigation is stealing.

Poverty and Wealth

Both Testaments have much to say about poverty and wealth, but what is poverty? What is wealth? We shall never agree.

The first reason is that each society and culture determines how material possessions are secured, used and viewed. One might suggest that the dividing line between the poor and those who are not is having basic *necessities* and what is *adequate* for one's subsistence and livelihood. But what counts for *necessities* and *adequate* in one society will be different from another. The answers depend, to some extent, on what is considered poverty or wealth in a given community or society.

Second, these questions are very personal and charged with intense emotion. It is difficult to be detached and objective because any definition may threaten my own status. It is always wise to read the Bible crossculturally—with brothers and sisters from other cultures. It may be very revealing to do so when it comes to passages on wealth and poverty—passages we might otherwise breeze past.

Let's assume that rigid dividing lines between rich and poor are not easy to come by, that the vast majority of Americans are far wealthier than their counterparts in most non-Western nations, and that specific applications

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across the board may not be possible. Is wealth considered anything more than basic necessities? Let us also assume that the primary emphasis in Scripture on this subject is the loving response of those who have to those who do not. Still, problems persist.

A basic problem is the apparently radical difference between what the Old and New Testaments say about wealth. Jacques Ellul makes the sweeping statement: "Incontestably, in the New Testament wealth is condemned," whereas the Old Testament sees it as God's blessing.[17]

How shall we assess this assertion? Perhaps we could say, first, that in the theocratic nation of ancient Israel, material blessings were promised for covenant obedience and material curses for disobedience in a physical location (Lev 26; Deut 28). By contrast, Christians are scattered throughout the nations, and their ultimate allegiance is to a heavenly kingdom. Second, the New Testament does not teach that wealth is a sign of God's blessing *and* often condemns the rich: "Blessed are you poor," but "woe to you who are rich" (Lk 6:20, 24; see Mt 19:24; Lk 16:13-14; 18:25). But aren't there ungodly, greedy poor? And should we all "sell [our] possessions" (Lk 12:33-34; 14:33)? What do these passages mean? How should we appropriate them?

A closer look at the New Testament. As we look more closely at the New Testament, a few themes begin to take shape.

- As with the Old Testament, *God has a special concern for the poor, needy and vulnerable in society* (Lk 4:18). Some incorrectly speak of God's "bias" for the poor, as though God is less concerned for the wealthy.
- *There are far more temptations and spiritual dangers with wealth than with poverty*—finding security in it, insulating ourselves from the needs of others, stinginess, comparison to others. Wealth and godliness, though possible, are uncommon. The Bible never says that possession of wealth is sinful.
- Contrary to Ellul's comment about the New Testament's wholesale condemnation of wealth, *the New Testament speaks approvingly of many wealthy followers of Christ.* In Luke 6, Jesus says that the poor are "blessed" but "woe" to the rich (Lk 6:20, 24). Yet two chapters later we read of

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well-to-do women who supported Jesus out of their means (Lk 8:1-3). Joseph of Arimathea was a wealthy disciple of Christ (Mt 25:57). Jesus ate meals at people's homes and stayed with them (e.g., Lk 10:38-42; Jn 12:1-2). As R. T. France noted: "Jesus' very dependence on hospitality and contributions from supporters demanded that a considerable number of his followers were not without private means."[18] In the epistles, we see how Paul's ministry depended on the generosity of others. In Romans 16:1-2, Paul mentions Phoebe, a prominent woman and financial "patron" (*prostatis*); Gaius (Rom 16:23a) had hosted Paul and the entire Corinthian church, and Paul mentions the prominent Erastus (Rom 16:23b)—the city's director of public works or "steward" (*oikonomos*). What of Jesus' words that one could not be Jesus' disciple unless he gave up all his possessions (Lk 14:33)? Actually, Jesus' own disciples only *temporarily* left their possessions behind (cf. Mt 19:27). Peter still had his home (Mk 1:29-30) as well as fishing boat and tackle (Jn 21:3-11). And we have seen that Jesus had well-off disciples, and there were many wealthy but generous Christian patrons in the early church. The point is that wealth should not be idolatrously clutched, but held lightly and used generously for the spread of God's kingdom.

- *The Bible does not advocate appropriating the wealth of the rich* (cf. Acts 5:4). While Jesus commanded the rich young man to sell all he had, give to the poor, and then follow Christ (Lk 18:22), in the very next chapter he noticeably does *not* do so to Zacchaeus, who generously makes restitution from his wealth (Lk 19:1-9). In 1 Timothy 6:17-19, the rich are not instructed to become poor. Indeed, as Dallas Willard noted, the worst way to *help* the poor is to *become* poor. Scripture does not tell us to *imitate* the poor but to *help* them.[19] The rich are *not* instructed to divest themselves totally, but rather to be rich toward God and give to those who are in need. *The way to fight greed and a false security in "the uncertainty of riches" is to be generous with our resources.*
- The incarnation and atoning sacrifice of Christ are the new model for showing generosity (2 Cor 8–9), not the Old Testament tithe. Christ became (materially) poor so that we through his poverty might become

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(spiritually) rich (2 Cor 8:9). Jesus, not Abraham or the Mosaic law, should be our model.

What then is "excess"? Each one is accountable to one's own master. "Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another?" (Rom 14:4 RSV). But it must mean *something,* and something that consumer-oriented Americans apparently find difficult to comprehend.

Living more simply. In a society of excess, luxury, and waste, Western Christians should cultivate a spirit of contentment and learn to say, "Enough!" (Phil 4:10-13). We should learn to live more simply that others may simply live. At the great Lausanne Congress on Evangelism, several thousand church leaders committed themselves to this simplicity: "We cannot hope to attain this goal without sacrifice. All of us are shocked by the poverty of millions and disturbed by the injustices which cause it. Those of us who live in affluent circumstances accept our duty to develop a simple lifestyle in order to contribute more generously to both relief and evangelism."

But what *is* a simple lifestyle? Though the debate is never-ending, let us, for practical purposes, make an attempt to describe it, following 2 Corinthians 8:13-14 and 1 Timothy 6:8. If "absolute poverty" is defined as living below subsistence level, and "poverty" is defined as subsistence-level living without things others in the society consider necessities, perhaps a "simple lifestyle" would be having one's basic necessities or "needs" met (see table 27.1). This is the kind of "equality" which Paul is urging.

Table 27.1. A Simple Lifestyle in Perspective

Absolute Poverty	Poverty	Simple Lifestyle	Wealth	Riches
Below subsistence: lack of food and housing	Subsistence, but lack of other necessities	Basic necessities as defined by a given society	Possessions beyond necessities	Abundant wealth, hoarded for protection or used for extravagant living

Again, if this comes anywhere near to indicating a biblical view, then, as Paul urges in 2 Corinthians 8, believers who live *above* a simple lifestyle (having "abundance") should sacrifice to the limits of their faith and love in an effort to assist those who live below that level so that their basic ne-

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cessities ("needs") are attended to so that there is "equality" (2 Cor 8:13-14). Every believer in the church having her basic needs met—not redistribution of wealth—appears to be what Paul means by "equality" (see table 27.2).

Table 27.2. What Paul Means by "Equality"

"Need"			"Equality"	"Abundance"
Absolute Poverty	Poverty	Simple Lifestyle	Wealth	Riches

Thus, the believer who has possessions above basic necessities can hardly rest at ease so long as there are those who lack basic necessities.

Also, to live more simply, we must begin by distinguishing between *needs* and *desires,* and we should refuse to let Madison Avenue define needs for us. We don't *need* "new" or "name brand." In our throwaway culture, Christians should think about "recycling" clothes or household items. Perhaps Christians can think more in terms of hand-me-downs, second-hand or thrift stores, and garage sales. What about savings, auto and home insurance, retirement accounts? On the one hand, we must remember that we cannot—nor should we attempt to—insulate ourselves from all possible risks or control the future. If we do, what room is left for trusting in our heavenly Father? That said, we must also consider whether failure to attend to these matters will place significant burdens on others.

What about leaving a large inheritance to one's children? Few can handle wealth well, and a large inheritance may actually contribute to a false sense of security, encouraging trust in the uncertainty of riches rather than in God. It seems wiser to leave a more modest—rather than extravagant—inheritance to our children so that we may more directly invest our resources into the kingdom of God, in addition to teaching our children the benefits and joys of earning their own way.[20]

As we think through various viewpoints on poverty and wealth in the light of Scripture, we commend John Wesley's dictum in revised form: "Get all you can, save all you can, give all you can." Perhaps it will serve as a summary statement of the individual's responsibility if we qualify this carefully: Earn all you can with integrity, save all you can toward meeting

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known future obligations, give all you can in sacrificial love and faith in the God who provides.

Social Responsibility

State. In addition to our walking humbly before God, he also requires that we not only "act justly," but also "love mercy" (Mic 6:8). The state has a responsibility to maintain justice for all citizens. However, as is powerfully illustrated in Victor Hugo's novel *Les Misérables,* Inspector Javert is concerned only for law and justice; he has no sense of context or moral proportion concerning the situation of Jean Valjean, who had stolen a loaf of bread to feed his sister's family. Valjean is caught and sentenced to years in Toulon prison. After nineteen years Valjean escapes, and it becomes Javert's life's mission to find him and have him punished. Javert's cold legalism and lack of personal concern for others are crushing and ultimately self-destructive.

Justice is not enough when the weak and oppressed are in need of care and relief. While not ignoring justice, mercy is life-giving and assists people in their misery rather than leaving them mired in it. The first line of defense in showing mercy is the family; they have an obligation to attend to their kin in need (1 Tim 5:8). The church too must take seriously its own responsibilities for the family of faith. Beyond this, governments have a primary obligation to needy citizens at home—though not to neglect meeting needs in other lands as able. As noted above, *how* the government attempts to help is crucial. Compassionate feelings or merciful motives are inadequate in themselves.

The church. *Care for its own.* Corporate responsibility in the church begins with the obligation to fully care for its own. This care is not merely "spiritual." The early church attended to the basic needs of those in their midst (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-37; 6:1; 11:29-30; 2 Cor 8–9). Local congregations assumed responsibility for the poor and widows in their midst—but also those in great need in other congregations. Paul gave instructions for widow-care (1 Tim 5:1-16), but he warned against idleness and all forms of "freeloading" (2 Thess 3:6-15). If one didn't work, one wasn't to eat.

Care for others. The church has primary responsibility for its own but is

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instructed to care also, as able, for others in need. We should be generous to "all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Gal 6:10 RSV). This need not only be monetary or material. It can extend to teaching one's native tongue to international students or refugees, tutoring underprivileged public school children, visiting prisoners and helping their families, or offering financial advice in a struggling community.

Addressing the government. Furthermore, in matters of righteousness, justice and mercy, the church is to speak prophetically to the state. The believer may lose her head for the effort (as John the Baptist did when he rebuked the king), or he may be discriminated against and immobilized (as Jeremiah was). Much of the suffering of prophets and apostles resulted from confronting state authority. In our day, many pastors are positively timid about the evils of abortion and do not speak up on the topic of gay marriage. It is always dangerous to cross governmental authority, yet this is the risk a faithful church must take when the state does wrong.

Using money and getting money. Finally, the church must act in integrity in getting and using money. Churches are under obligation not to misuse (or even appear to misuse) money. Paul exemplified this: he worked with his own hands, labored long, coveted no one's possessions, and refused to be a burden to anyone (Acts 20:33-35; 2 Cor 11:6-9; 1 Thess 2:5-10). Peter cursed Simon for seeking to use the gospel as a means of gain (Acts 8:18-20).

Consider first the *use* of money. While some in society may look down on TV personalities who live in luxury, pastors with extravagant salaries and opulent lifestyles will be more closely scrutinized and more roundly criticized. What about the ways of *getting* money? As an example of "full information with solicitation," Paul commanded believers to give to support the Jerusalem church (1 Cor 16:1-3; 2 Cor 8); but George Müller of Bristol with his orphans and Hudson Taylor of the China Inland Mission told no one but God of their needs ("no information, no solicitation"). A third method is "full information, no solicitation"—sharing about financial needs with partners in ministry while asking only God for money. Should one method be adopted over others?

Of course, no method pleases God if we do not ultimately trust him to supply, and we should certainly not place our faith in gimmicks or for-

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mulas. Certain "successful" fundraising tactics may not be pleasing to God. However, we do not see any one method as divinely approved over against the other two mentioned above.

Of course, unscrupulous, deceptive methods should never be used in fundraising. One leading African evangelistic mission introduced a starving child, Kori, to faithful supporters, with a heartrending plea for funds in November 1982. The fatal error was in using the same photograph a few months later in July 1983 but calling her Sera and claiming she lived in a different place from "Kori." Another form of deception is the "bait and switch." The money is solicited for one cause but diverted to another, even to the personal benefit of the luxury-loving leader. A third unscrupulous method is psychological manipulation—inducing people to do things they wouldn't do if you approached them in a straightforward, honest way. One of the basic "rules" of the fundraising game is that there must be a crisis once a month to produce maximum income. Even if a crisis did not happen, some fundraisers advocate "creating" one. Another manipulative tactic is to make the computer-generated letter seem highly personal so that it appears the TV preacher is a personal friend of yours if you give a certain amount per month. Other methods promise beautifully engraved permanent plaques with the very generous donor's name on it. One could be part of a "Golden Circle" of supporters, whose names are well-publicized for their especially large gift. Churches and ministries have developed a celebrity system with speakers demanding astronomical sums, posh accommodations and insulation from contact with people apart from their time "on stage."

Unbiblical teaching *about* money is often a problem too. Many TV personalities and songwriters promulgate the prosperity gospel—if you love Jesus (and especially if you send us cash), you will prosper financially, be healthy in body and be successful in all things. Simply by asserting "I am healed" or "I am rich," we have what we ask: "What I confess, I possess."

While there are no doubt lessons to be learned about more boldly trusting in God, such a belief system,[21] renders humans sovereign and God their servant. This is far removed from Daniel's three friends who said to Nebuchadnezzar: "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the

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furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But *even if He does not,* let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up" (Dan 3:17-18). While we should approach God confidently (Heb 4:12), we should not approach presumptuously. This "name it and claim it" heresy is opposed to the spirit of Jesus himself, who said, "Not My will, but Yours be done" (Lk 22:42). And we could add Paul too, who learned to be content and find strength in Christ whatever his circumstances (Phil 4:10-13); when denied what he repeatedly requested, he was promised Christ's sufficient grace (2 Cor 12:7-10). As for the gospel and money, we should adopt Paul's approach: "Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit" (2 Cor 2:17 NIV).

Corporate Integrity

Ways to lose it. There are many ways a business can steal besides abusing its employees or lying in its advertising. Price gouging, making inferior products and planned obsolescence are common ways of short-changing the consumer, ethically and materially. In an effort to keep a consumption-driven economy rolling, advertising manipulates consumers into buying what is not needed or what is not long wanted. The ways of misusing fellow humans for financial gain seem endless.

But there are those who do business the other way. The owner of a successful Atlanta-based corporation told me (Robertson) that he had recently adopted a new corporate motto: "A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches" (Prov 22:1 RSV). As I reflected on this bold decision to restructure a business on a biblical principle, it gradually dawned on me that this proverb sets on its head standard business practice, especially the advertising business. The bottom line is supposed to be financial profit ("great riches" of another sort) rather than a good name built on solid character as the foundation for doing business. In fact, the purpose of creating a "good" name through advertising is to build profits. Whoever heard of using resources to demonstrate trustworthiness, to benefit the consumer so consistently that reputation is established in a good name? And yet what could be more clearly in the interest of glorifying God in a business?

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Automation and technology. One further way of corporate injustice has been alleged: automation. We have been unable to identify any biblical principle that could be used to oppose transfer of labor from people to labor-saving devices. It is quite possible, of course, to make the transition in unjust or unmerciful ways, but guilt for this failure should not be assigned to the machine or those designing it.

We could add that technology and automation replace persons in other ways. First, technology has a secularizing effect, further removing us from God—the ultimate personal being—by diminishing our trust in him and thus shriveling up our prayer lives. Why depend on God when technology is at our fingertips and everyday life seems to hang together so well? If we allow it, technology subtly leads to a kind of control over reality, but the downside is that our world becomes increasingly mechanized. Ever so subtly, Christians can become practical atheists, as dependence on God is displaced with dependence on technology; as a result moderns become not so much hostile to God, but indifferent to him.

Overdependence on technology can also turn us into empty selves—mere whisps of persons who have surrendered their rational thought, critical thinking and creativity to entertainment. We must recognize this danger in order to combat it lest we enter a brave new world in which we surrender critical thinking while we "amuse ourselves to death."

Technology also cut us off from community; it depersonalizes life. Even though we are more "connected" than ever through Facebook, text messaging and email, we seem to be more distant from each other and shallower in our relationships. Technology can isolate us from each other. Think of children watching videos in the family van instead of engaging with the family—or how even children in strollers are using iPads and thus being less engaged with the world around them. Think of how cell phones or text messages interrupt our conversation, how students will gather around YouTube video clips for entertainment, how a dating couple or a group of friends will sit at a restaurant table checking their iPhones or texts instead of conversing.

Relationships in America are becoming three thousand miles wide and half an inch deep. We are wise to keep in check the influence of technology

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not only on our children, but also ourselves. Knowing the danger is the first step to combating it.[22]

Poverty, Famine, Population Explosion

Poverty. There are three main types of poverty in the world. *Collective* poverty (which includes *class* and *regional* poverty) is the semipermanent insufficiency of the material means of life for an entire population and can be applied to nations such as India. *Cyclical* poverty is the widespread but temporary deprivation caused by disease, crop failure or economic breakdown (such as the government-generated high unemployment rates during the 1930s). *Individual* poverty is a condition of want that results from an individual's misfortune or inability to work, including widows, orphans, physically handicapped, outcasts, aged, mentally deficient and alcoholics.[23]

Scripture does rebuke those who are poor as a result of laziness (Prov 6:6-11). Scripture speaks with greater force against poverty due to oppression, whether individual or corporate. Jesus came to proclaim good news to the poor and release to captives, and to liberate the oppressed (Lk 4:18-19). This is not merely setting people free from sin. As Matthew 25 makes clear, Christ will judge people on his return, and the indicator of redemption is, at least in part, measured by bringing relief to physical need and oppression. Yes, Jesus speaks here of caring for "my brothers"—that is, his disciples (Mt 25:40; cf. Mt 12:46-50). However, Proverbs 19:17 reminds us that the one "who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD, and He will repay him for his good deed." Some people are simply trapped in cycles of oppression and poverty. Think of the Dalits (or "untouchables")—the very "lowest" in Indian society. Throughout many parts of the world, opportunity eludes people, and they are trapped in persistent poverty and oppression.

We could note that certain oppressive religious structures contribute to these persistent conditions of poverty and oppression, whether the caste system in India or the general eclipsing of women in Islam. However, our main concern is not to pinpoint systemic "causes," but to highlight with Scripture the importance of both corporate (communal) as well as individual responsibility.

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Scripture calls for both broad-based action and private involvement. Change must begin with the individual—and let us not forget the role of redemption (and thus the role of evangelism) as critical to generating significant internal change. That said, all individuals are responsible to involve those in their sphere of influence to find corporate solutions, whether a mother with her children, a pastor with his church, a businesswoman with her policies, or a public servant with his power to change and use the structures of society to promote justice and mercy.

Also, people within their own nations must press for legal and political reforms—ones that will be consistently enforced by the government—so that every person will be treated justly before the law. This is a common path to helping people climb out of poverty. For example, Hernando de Soto's classic book *The Other Path* documents how Peru, because of its poverty and economic disarray, had become vulnerable to terrorist groups such as the Shining Path, black market forces and corruption. Through the initiative of the Fujimori government, the de Soto Institute for Liberty and Democracy crafted laws regarding property rights and contracts, which eventually led to a full-fledged economy and the eventual defeat of the Shining Path.[24]

Starvation and population explosion. Back in the early 1980s, I (Paul) received as a gift the rather depressing *Global 2000 Report to the President;* this book contains frightening predictions of Doomsday proportions regarding increased scarcity of resources and forecasts all manner of shortages and natural resource disasters. Paul Ehrlich, noted for his gloomy *Population Bomb* predictions, said that hundreds of millions would starve to death in the 1970s.

As it turns out, rumors of humanity's pending death have been greatly exaggerated. For example, extreme poverty has been reduced by half in the developing world since the 1980s; life expectancy has doubled around the world in the last hundred years; India's average caloric intake is 50 percent higher than it was in 1950; China's food supply increased by 80 percent between 1961 and 2002; the percentage of starving people worldwide has dropped from 38 percent in 1970 to 18 percent in 2001; quality drinking water is more widely available.[25] This not to say that all is rosy in the world,

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but significant improvements in the health and quality of life of people throughout the world are undeniable realities.

Besides this, we are seeing two forces at work—*urbanization* and *globalization.* Urbanization—the growth of urban centers as rural populations stream there—brings various social problems (lagging infrastructure, crowded conditions, urban sprawl, poverty, pollution, sexual slavery). The same could have been said for now-developed urban centers a hundred years ago. As for globalization, the world has become smaller and more interconnected through information and technology, the global market, communications and democracy—factors contributing to "globalization." On the downside, globalization tends to homogenize or "flatten" cultures through the exporting of McDonald's, Coca-Cola, Starbucks and Hollywood (what Benjamin Barber calls "McWorld"). In response to these developments, there is pushback from various religious and tribalistic forces (which Barber labels "Jihad").[26] These tensions call for vigilance to protect human rights and religious freedoms but also to take measures to preserve culture while freeing them up to flourish economically.

This is not to say that poverty, accompanied by hunger and starvation, are no longer a concern. We all should be concerned about addressing these concerns in the right way. What is their cause and cure? Some claim the problem is *overpopulation* while others say it is the *distribution of available resources.* In his day, British clergyman Thomas Malthus (1766–1834) predicted massive overpopulation and subsequent depletion of available resources to feed humankind. Many today make similar claims. However, we noted in chapter twenty that the "teeming masses" are not found in India or China but rather in densely populated countries such as Holland, Belgium and Japan; we also pointed out that if the earth's population were nine billion (it's nearly seven billion at present), we could fit every man, woman and child into the state of Texas (262,134 square miles of land) with each person having 850 square feet for himself—and the rest of the earth would be empty.[27] Furthermore, the world's population is *growing,* but it is not generally more crowded. In fact, in places such as Russia, Japan and various Western European countries, populations are shrinking. For example, Russia's population

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will drop by thirty million people by 2050.[28] Despite straight-line mathematical calculations, the actual facts about population growth and distribution are not as frightening.

Scholars Herman Kahn and Julian Simon have argued that, in actual human existence, at present there are no known limits to healthy growth and that overpopulation is an unnecessary worry. When legal provisions and equal opportunity are part of a culture, human innovation through science keeps inventing ways of producing more and alternate energy and food resources and wealth generation; think of how a resource as basic as *sand* has been used to produce computer chips and fiber-optic cables. Some countries simply fail to appropriate their own natural resources.

Population tends to be self-limited as poverty *decreases,* or limited by catastrophe if poverty *increases.* That is, science, education and enlightened governmental policies (e.g., private property laws) enable people to advance economically, and then they tend to stop having as many children. And this is what we see happening in the world. History itself shows that limits to growth have also come through disease, famine or war.

As we assess the evidence, we cannot conscientiously advocate demanding a limit to population growth. And if a nation does make population limitation a matter of public policy, it should not go about it in the manner of mainland China's mandatory one-child policy—a policy of abortion and coercive family limitation, which is not acceptable. Sadly, as we saw earlier, China is reaping a whirlwind of missing girls in its population and dramatically affecting China's future and national well-being. Ethical ways of going about limiting population growth involve persuasion, education and perhaps feasible incentives.

Helping the poor abroad. How should we help the poor around the world? Of course, in emergency situations of famine or other natural disasters, we give immediate, tangible *emergency* aid to those who have been ravaged. As a matter of course, however, simply handing out financial "aid" to other governments has proven disastrous since it typically goes into the pockets of thugs, tyrants and dictators. The problem in many of these nations is not potential resources (Ethiopia, say, has more arable land than Great Britain, but does not utilize it well).[29]

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Poverty in other lands is not due to "unfair competition," nor is it a matter of an economic zero-sum game: "if I win, you will have to lose." This is the view that prosperity in developed nations is causally linked to poverty in developing ones—a view known as the "dependency theory." This view has been thoroughly discredited by the facts of history and the realities on the ground. It has come to be abandoned by many in places such as Latin America precisely because it has led to many failed policies that harmed the poor.[30]

The problems are more often widespread corruption, inequality before the law, no legal protections of contracts and private property, no genuine opportunity to appropriate national resources, no opportunity for investment, and no protection of the value of currency (which leads to inflation). Free nations should continually apply political pressure for structural changes to protect from such abuses. They should press for excluding thug, rights-abusing nations from having influence in places such as the United Nations, which has had a sullied reputation of catering to "thugocracies."

One attempt to help the poor in other nations has been through "fair trade." For example, people will pay a bit more for their coffee to support coffee growers in Costa Rica rather than buying it more cheaply at Starbucks or Dunkin' Donuts. After all, don't these corporations exploit coffee growers by paying them less? Actually, coffee growers are *not* being forced to grow coffee; in fact, they do have jobs thanks to these large corporations, which must process, package and market their product. Also, "fair trade" has a downside: it actually locks coffee growers into generating one product or being in one line of work. They may be confined to growing one kind of crop without the opportunity to switch to another crop if demand for (pricier) coffee should drop—nor do they have the option to use their land for a nonagricultural business.[31]

One practical way to make a difference in the lives of the poor is in the area of microenterprise development. In the late 1980s, my (Paul's) wife Jacqueline and a friend helped established what is now called PEER Servants (www.peerservants.org); this innovative ministry utilized the concept of microfinance loans in order to help the poor in developing nations become economically self-sufficient. This ministry was inspired by a

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New York Times story about the successful Grameen Bank of Bangladesh (founded in 1976), whose founder, Muhammad Yunus, would later be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his groundbreaking work. The basic concept is this: willing entrepreneurs with good character references can begin their own business with a loan from an organization that raises funds for this very purpose. They can purchase goats, mechanic's tools or a sewing machine to begin a business. Once the business gets going, they pay back the loan at minimal interest, and the next person in line becomes a loan recipient. Western-funded foreign aid (aside from assisting with emergency relief) has not helped the poor in developing nations, as we have noted. PEER Servants, which raises funds for loan partners throughout the world, has helped many hundreds of thousands of people move out of poverty to economic self-sufficiency.[32]

Wealth creation has not come through government programs. Rather, PEER Servants—virtually all volunteers rather than paid staff—raises capital for microfinance loans and then works with reputable churches or missions organizations in other nations to offer loans to people of character without strings attached, and, as a result, many lives have also been transformed by the gospel. Other organizations such as Partners International and World Relief have also been aiding the poor in this way.

Helping the poor at home. What about helping the disadvantaged poor closer to home?[33] One approach advocates that we stop giving out money in order that the poor become more responsible for themselves and less dependent on others. While this approach has some truth to it, to the ears of many this tack, by itself, can sound calloused and lacking in compassion. Another approach tends to measure compassion by dollars directed toward social programs. As we have seen above, this "handout-without-responsibility" approach, though well-intentioned, has been disastrous. Besides being wasteful, this approach typically breeds long-term dependency as well as creating a deepened and regularly reinforced sense of entitlement.

The government should not support the able-bodied who can find work but refuse to; with this point in mind, the welfare reform of 1996 helped move many people from welfare to work and shrank welfare case-loads. But to help the disadvantaged poor, they must also be empowered, which

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can come through several important avenues. First, empowerment comes through *safety and crime reduction in poor neighborhoods* (e.g., citizens volunteering to patrol unsafe neighborhoods in cooperation with local law enforcement authorities). Second, empowerment comes through *loving relationships and support structures to rebuild relationships*—particularly the preservation of the traditional family. As out-of-wedlock births increase, so does the likelihood of poverty, crime and unemployment. Of course, political and social leaders must address the breakdown of the family directly, calling for moral and personal responsibility rather than ignoring it. In our politically correct culture, many are reluctant to call certain behaviors wrong, and this only exacerbates the problem.

Furthermore, concerned citizens can serve as role models, mentors, friends and tutors; churches, ministries and community organizations can offer not only relationships, accountability and role-modeling, but they can help strengthen marriages and families as well as offer broad-based support (e.g., Christian churches, Big Brothers/Sisters, Alcoholics Anonymous, Salvation Army, Prison Fellowship, Catholic Charities). In fact, before government welfare programs formally came into existence, America's churches and volunteer and charitable organizations served to assist and empower the poor: they urged family involvement to help care for their own flesh and blood; they encouraged personal responsibility and accountability; they insisted on labor for food—unlike many of our soup kitchens today! Marvin Olasky's book *The Tragedy of American Compassion* tells of this seemingly lost, but powerful, chapter of our nation's history.

Another means of empowering the poor is *education.* Unfortunately, public education has failed the poor, and parents—not teachers' unions and bureaucrats—must take ownership of their schools once again, including competitive school options rather than being confined to dead-end, failing schools. (The film *Waiting for Superman* attempts to illustrate this point.) One important way to do this is through injecting some *competition* into the educational system, granting tax vouchers for less-fortunate parents who can then send their children to schools that are actually performing well, as we have mentioned. Despite the rhetoric of many Washington politicians to support public schools unconditionally,

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they themselves typically send their own children to private schools. Even public school teachers in places such as Chicago are sending their own children to private schools "in droves."[34]

Another important element in empowering the poor is *the redemptive uplift that spiritual regeneration through Christ can bring.* Marvin Olasky points out in his book that before government programs, Christian volunteer organizations ("charities") and churches knew that the only answer to the habits and mindsets of some people was God and his grace. They could be transformed from being idle and irresponsible into being frugal, industrious and self-controlled. The gospel has power to transform attitudes and behavior, including one's work ethic.

These are some practical ways in which the poor can be holistically empowered, and the church should once again take its place and fully engage genuine poverty in our midst—and avoid failed "solutions" that continue to plague our society.

Creation Care

In the 1960s, Lynn White Jr. attacked the Christian faith as the chief reason for the destruction of nature and claimed that Eastern religion—even animism—is the preferred eco-friendly alternative.[35] True, our industrial history has been full of exploiters and wasters of natural resources (some of them professing Christians) who, without regard to the well-being of future generations, have left the earth in much worse condition than when they found it. They have not loved their not-yet-existent neighbors as themselves. We should be concerned about air and water pollution, acid rain, chemical dumping, species extinction[36] and other indications of the abuse of our stewardship. While White's essay and the increasing interest in environmental issues by society at large have provoked Christians to reexamine the biblical teaching about creation care, we can rightly question White's basic thesis.

Fundamental to the human calling as priest-kings is to be co-rulers with the triune God over the creation (Gen 1:26-28; Ps 8). Christ, the true human, came to restore our humanity and revitalize our calling as priest-kings as part of God's new creation (1 Pet 2:9; Rev 1:6; 5:10; cf. 2 Cor 5:17;

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Gal 6:15). Ours is not a gnostic—or otherworldly—spirituality that disregards the "very good" physical creation God has made (Gen 1:31). Just as the triune, relational God lovingly cares for and tends to his creation (Ps 104), we are called to be caretakers *with* God—stewards of our God-given responsibility. Humans are called not only to "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth," but also to "subdue" and "rule over" it (Gen 1:28). Yet this mandate includes being *cultivators* of the earth, as Genesis 2 indicates.

These Genesis texts indicate that humans, though in God's image, are *part* of creation. So this requires humble, not arrogant, treatment of creation. God is pleased when humans use their strength, ingenuity and cooperation to construct irrigation systems for communities, create communication technologies, "subdue" diseases like malaria and polio, and perform corrective surgeries on children born with cleft palates.

As co-rulers with God, we must remember that the triune God *owns* everything (Ps 24:1). We are just tenants or stewards with a weighty responsibility. We can care for it—or abuse, deplete and destroy it (cf. Ex 23:10-11; Lev 25:1-7).

Loren Wilkinson attacks the fatalistic notion that there is nothing Christians can do to care for creation. He enjoins us to follow the three R's—reduce, reuse and recycle. Yet Christians must do more, including *resisting* the values and allure of a consumer society as well as *rejoicing* at the wonder and promises of creation.[37] Driving through the breathtaking Canadian Rockies in summer or the fall foliage of New England or going snorkeling through coral reefs that teem with life and color can help us elevate our theology of creation and our concern for the amazing world God has made.

The creation is not an instrument to be used for our ends; rather, we are to care for it and appropriate its resources for the glory of God and the benefit of humankind. Moreover, it seems wiser that Christians should speak with greater theological clarity about "creation," "creation care," "theology of creation," and the like rather than the often ideologically loaded—and sometimes anti-Christian—language of "environmentalism" or "ecology." These movements may devalue human dignity (by accusing Christians of "speciesism" in giving priority to humans over animals and

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elevating human beings), denigrate human beings (as an accursed species on the planet) or even idolize nature (as with the pantheistic-sounding "Love your Mother [Earth]" slogan).

We live wisely by caring for creation; to do so means a life of loving others—not yet born—as ourselves. We should do what we feasibly can to work for a cleaner, more vibrant and life-sustaining planet and attempt to reverse damage done to creation by previous generations. In the process of caring for creation, we should not harm the poor or unduly burden ordinary citizens. For example, vast resources that could be used to address genuine societal needs are being marshaled to combat "human-generated climate change"—the evidence for which is at best mixed and at worst fudged or fabricated.[38] A more obvious approach would be to, say, prevent malaria and water-borne diseases, which *directly* and *immediately* affect many millions of human lives. Or consider how the massive production of biofuels like ethanol from corn can actually diminish food supplies that could otherwise aid the starving poor in other parts of the world.[39] We must operate with proper priorities that take basic human needs into account.

We should be prudent in assessing often ideologically loaded, sometimes pantheistically based "environmental" claims, but we should continue to examine the evidence, adopt lifestyles that do not strain our environment, and attempt to "clean up after ourselves."[40]

Gambling

Should not the subject of gambling be under the heading of "Personal Integrity" rather than "Social Responsibility"? We chose the social context for considering the ethics of gambling because it is very difficult—if not impossible—to make a convincing case from Scripture against gambling as inherently sinful, but it is no difficult task at all to marshal biblical evidence against gambling as a social evil.

Even though games of chance and other forms of gambling predate the writing of Scripture, the Bible is silent on the subject. Perhaps that is why the church has vacillated in its teaching. But on what grounds have Christians condemned it? The charge that it is a form of *stealing* seems ill-

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founded since stealing is taking by force that which one has no right to take. In the case of gambling, the loser has agreed in advance, and the risk of loss is freely undertaken in the hope of making a gain or having fun. Or does it violate the law against *covetousness.* This is certainly true for the serious gambler, but it can hardly be alleged against the person who gambles for recreation. What about putting money down for a fun evening of bingo, for a raffle ticket to win a prize, or, as my (Paul's) late landlady did, play bridge with friends for literal pennies? Some have claimed that gambling is an unnecessary risk that *seeks selfish gain at another's expense.* But are these sinful attitudes inherent in the act?

The most common argument against gambling is *the sovereignty of God*—to deliberately take a risk on an uncertain outcome is to call in question God's sovereign control of our affairs or actually to invoke God's involvement in our attempt to gain at another's expense. The same argument was used in earlier centuries against insurance. Life is full of risks and prudent "gambles" based on the law of averages: purchasing health insurance, investing in the stock market, putting money in the bank. These are good-faith efforts to reduce risk or receive an honest return on investment. And those doing so have every right to humbly ask the Almighty to intervene should they err. Not so with high-stakes gambling.

Though a more weighty argument, the divine sovereignty criterion is not compelling for two reasons. First, it is only applicable to the serious gambler. Second, even for the serious gambler, the argument could be turned the other way. In Scripture gambling was specifically used in making decisions because humans are finite, and God alone knows and can intervene in behalf of one party or the other: "The lot is cast into the lap, but the decision is wholly from the LORD" (Prov 16:33 RSV; see also 18:18). In fact, "casting the lot" was standard practice in settling disputes, dividing the Promised Land, choosing people for a position—all things that could well be of greater value than money. Even an apostle was so chosen (Acts 1:26). Subjecting the outcome of a decision of great moment to the chance toss of the dice was seen as deliberately invoking the intervention of the sovereign One, not flouting his will or authority, much less making light of it. If one deliberately trusts God with the outcome of a chance event—either

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"contrived" or unplanned—it can hardly be said that he is resisting God.

Thus we do not see gambling as inherently evil. A person could conceivably be generous, not covet, love her neighbor more than herself, and explicitly trust the sovereignty of God while betting a Coke on the outcome of a game. But that most gamblers violate one or more of these principles is beyond dispute. Human experience indicates that even recreational gambling can promote covetousness and lead away from giving as a way of life. It often nurtures the fantasy that luck rather than hard work is a way to prosperity—a scenario all too common with lottery tickets. So for this reason we should be cautious in example and speech so that it may not lead others into habits that are not pleasing to God. This prompts us to ask about the social impact of gambling.

Social effects of gambling. What are the social effects of gambling? Gambling addicts (compulsive gamblers) now constitute a higher percentage of the American population than alcoholics. And the results in poverty-destroyed families are hardly less tragic. The American Psychiatric Association considers gambling a pathology when people, for instance, lie about how much they gamble, go into debt to sustain their gambling habit, lose relationships over gambling, commit crimes to get money to gamble, or feel irritable when trying to quit or cut back.[41] As such, it becomes a total obsession so that nothing else and no other people really matter—a fantasy dream world of riches leading to an inability to feel for others, a cloistered inner life, lying to guard a secret inner world and, commonly, poverty.

The gambling business is dominated by the major crime syndicates. One organized crime boss said that the syndicates could get along very well on gambling alone even without their other mainstays: narcotics and prostitution. Estimates of the total take are little more than wild guesses, ranging up to a half trillion dollars annually.

State lotteries. Why would state governments want to get into such a sordid business? State governments are gambling that lotteries will provide a painless way to increase revenues. But to sociologist Roy Kaplan, lotteries are a poor substitute for "dependable, equitable, and responsible methods of revenue generation."[42] Often, though not always, lotteries for educational purposes, say, do little to help individual schools; these funds can

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easily be diverted by politicians and bureaucrats. For the funds that are raised for the state, sometimes less than a 1 percent tax raise would raise the same amount as lotteries—and lotteries are much less efficient. What's more, legalized gambling does not curtail organized crime.

The lottery is no "painless taxation"; it plays on human weakness for a "lucky break." And it is no coincidence that where the lottery is, there the vultures of syndicated crime will gather—that is, with the lottery, the state encourages a new crop of gamblers, and typically organized crime tends to roost nearby. The lure of the state lottery normally wears off in about one year, and the state must begin major marketing to enlist new gamblers. The state cannot compete with professional gamblers in the odds offered; so every new gambler enlisted is a potential recruit for the professionals. Thus the state finds itself an ally of organized crime, an exploiter of the poor, a promoter of social blight, and a loser in the gamble to make a bundle with little effort and little cost. No lottery has begun to measure up to optimistic projections, and many, within a decade, have failed financially. And who can calculate the cost to the state in the fight against organized crime and the accompanying corruption in law enforcement, not to mention the increase in welfare costs for increasing numbers of gambling losers?

In the light of the way gambling has worked out in the life of the nation, it seems the most responsible position for the Christian is to abstain from it, particularly when it comes to state lotteries and pari-mutuel betting (e.g., horse or dog races in which the pool of money from the bets is divided amongst the winners). Also, church-sponsored gambling should be avoided as this may encourage the wrong kinds of risk-taking habits that could lead to something more pernicious.

Non-Property Theft

Varieties of theft. "You shall not steal" applies not only to property; many other things can be stolen—reputation, for example, the stealing of which deprives the owner of a most precious possession, his name. Talk that diminishes a person is constantly used to steal a position, a job, a friendship, or even a marriage. All of these thefts are far more serious in effect than the

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theft of property, yet rarely can be prosecuted and never compensated.

Idea theft. Idea theft is often combined with deception to cover the theft, thus violating the ninth commandment as well. As we have seen, a majority of American students cheat. To make matters worse, an increasing number of teachers accept the practice. At least one judge has ruled in favor of the cheater and against the "honor system" that requires students to report cheating.

To plagiarize is to use another's writings or ideas and pass them off as one's own work. In a copy-and-paste world of electronic research papers, not only students but also scholars such as notable American historians Stephen Ambrose and Doris Kearns Goodwin have been caught plagiarizing from others. Some professors even plagiarize from their students. It may be difficult at times to know when the ideas of others have been so assimilated as to be one's own, but the use of quotations from others, giving the impression that they are one's own words, or the use of a concept that is unique to its originator clearly violates the commandments against lying and stealing.

This practice is rife in industry as well. How many technicians or junior executives have been hired away from their company in order to get at its secrets? So the theft is no longer merely private but corporate. Churches need to comply with copyright law so as not to rob authors and artists of their due; churches steal the benefit due an author by duplicating musical scores for the choir. While the lines can get fuzzy when a piece of literature or art, published for the general public, becomes public domain, the limits of how long an author or artist deserves protection for additional benefit that she or her descendants might get is a matter of judgment as to what is a fair return. In civilized society this judgment is corporate and established by law, though legitimately subject to change.

Laws do change, but the Christian is obligated to abide by the law as it stands, and copyright law is an honest effort to protect people from violations of the eighth commandment, "You shall not steal."

Time theft. Finally, it is possible, at least in the Western world, to steal time. Employees who come late or fritter away time on the job are not, technically, stealing time, but the benefit contracted for and due their em-

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ployer. But to carelessly or deliberately keep a person waiting for an appointment is believed by most people in Protestant-influenced nations to be a form of stealing. "Time is money," we say, and to steal my time is to steal my money. This would apply equally to the teacher who is careless about the time of students or the physician the time of clients, just as much as to the guest who holds up a dinner party.

But people in other cultures do not always share this view. In Latin and Eastern lands, for example, people are said to be *event*-oriented rather than *time*-oriented. People are not expected to be "on time" in starting or closing a meeting or engagement, nor even in getting the bus to the terminal on schedule. In such a culture, is tardiness an ethical matter? Or, instructed by others who are more casual about life, should Americans stop being so "hyper" about promptness?

The question of time theft in non-Western settings is still relevant. Does a person attend to her obligations? Would she behave differently if her boss were present? On the other hand, taking more time for certain partnerships or relationships may be more important in non-Western settings than some Western ones. For example, prospective business partners eating a meal together in such a setting can help build trust in a personal context. In such settings, the less-personal conference call, though more time-efficient, may be inadequate for establishing a trusting business partnership.

Ownership culturally defined. If it is accepted that stealing is taking from another that which one has no biblical or moral grounds for taking, the precise boundaries of what is "private property" and what is "one's right to take" may be somewhat conditioned by the views of a particular society. In ancient Israel it was permissible for the poor or the sojourner to glean the leftovers of the harvest but wrong for the owner to harvest the entire crop. But in many societies this "gleaning" would be viewed as stealing. In America one certainly does not "glean" in Wal-Mart or Target after a major sale! When people groups following two different definitions of "ownership" meet, there can be a clash. To Native Americans who did not recognize private land ownership, white people, coming with a different set of rules, were the ultimate thieves.

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In the ancient world, forgery was always wrong. However, writers felt free to "borrow" from others as something of a compliment to the previous authors, even if they did not acknowledge them by name. We see this in Scripture. Psalm 70 reuses and expands on Psalm 40:14-16, and Psalm 14 is only slightly revised as Psalm 53. Ancient writings also had their version of "ghost writers"; that is, authors used collaborators without necessarily mentioning their names (e.g., Josephus referred to his "helpers"). Paul used a good portion of similar material in both Colossians and Ephesians. James in his epistle utilizes much material from the Sermon on the Mount without sensing the need to acknowledge the original source! No one in the ancient world would accuse Paul or James of forgery. And it is likely that Paul not only had secretaries write for him, but in at least six letters he lists another person in the "sender" or "author" position (e.g., Timothy is in the opening of 2 Corinthians 1:1, but not in Romans, although he is present and sends greetings in Romans 16:21). In both scenarios, Paul would have had the final sign-off.[43]

These cultural differences do not necessarily undermine the commandment not to steal, for all societies recognize the right of personal ownership and consider robbery a crime. This understanding does not relativize biblical standards because the difference is not in the definition of *stealing,* but in the definition of *ownership,* and when taking what by whom is considered legitimate. Along the borders of definition of personal ownership there is some latitude for a society to establish its own norms, and it is wrong for Christians in that society, even if they are citizens of another society, to violate those norms. Whether the violation is inherently sinful or simply sinful by being declared illegal or unacceptable, the Christian should prove blameless.

Perhaps the question of stealing time falls in this category. If the person who loses time is offended, that is, considers it an unwarranted personal loss, then the sensitive Christian should not carelessly or deliberately "take that which is another's," for the Scripture gives him no right to do so.

Stealing and lying are often intertwined and feed one another. Furthermore, they have a single underlying principle: they violate integrity. So we turn now to the question of deception.

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28

Truth and Deception

You shall not bear false witness
against your neighbor.

Perjury and Lying

The ninth commandment focuses on perjury, deliberately making a false statement in a court of law. Perjury is especially serious since it threatens the integrity of the courts by which justice is secured for a people. Yet, as in each of the Ten Commandments, there is a deeper implication. "Do not lie to one another" (Col 3:9; cf. Lev 19:11) is a pervasive command in Scripture, and the law itself links perjury with all varieties of lying: dealing falsely, gossip, breaking contract, and, above all, swearing falsely in God's name (Lev 19:11-12, 16). Keeping one's lips from speaking what is false and being without guile is taught in both Testaments (Ps 34:13; Mk 7:22; Eph 4:22; 1 Pet 3:10). Lying or falsehood of all varieties is a major theme in the Proverbs and the Psalms (Ps 119:163). God himself hates lying, and he gives visible demonstration of this with Achan (Josh 7) and with Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5), who paid with their lives. God hates lying so much that it will be utterly excluded from the new creation (Rev 21:27), and indeed all liars will have a part in the lake of fire (Rev 21:8).

What is a lie? "To say words that do not conform to reality" is not a useful definition. We may constantly say things that do not conform to reality—a person writing a novel or a parent reading a fairy tale to her child—but this is not by itself a lie. We may err, but lies are *intentional*. So, is a lie simply deliberately speaking words that do not conform to reality?

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No, since once can deceive without using false words—or without using any words at all. Lying is a violation of the truth that includes a conscious intent to deceive.

The Nature of Deception

Why is lying a problem? It denies the character of God who is truth (Heb 6:18) and whose word embodies truth (Jn 17:17). Jesus said, "I am . . . the truth" (Jn 14:6)—there is nothing false in him. The Comforter is called "the Spirit of truth" (Jn 14:17). The triune God is utterly reliable, the source of both rationality itself as well as science, which is based on the existence of a coherent, predictable universe that can be studied and understood. Deception, then, engages in reality denial, a deliberate twisting of the way things are—particularly in relation to God, the ultimate reality: we say "Yes" to God's "No" and "No" to God's "Yes."

The German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer gives an example of this twisting of reality: a child may be embarrassed or ashamed about issues at home, such as his father's alcoholism. A prying teacher asks him in front of the class whether his father often comes home drunk. The child doesn't know how to handle this conflict and so, doing the best he can, denies it. The teacher, however, is in the wrong, and the child has an obligation to keep certain things within the family: "The family has its own secret and must preserve it." Even though the child denies the situation, Bonhoeffer says, he bears more truth than if he had betrayed his father's weakness.[1]

Because we live in a fallen, sinful world, some secrecy and hiding are necessary. After all, God gave Adam and Eve clothing to wear! To humiliate ("You're ugly") or to betray someone is not justified in the name of "speaking one's mind" or "being honest." This is actually a *distortion* of reality, which often requires silence about certain matters in order to protect the innocent and vulnerable. Lying is more than an intentional discrepancy between thought and speech. Bonhoeffer says that "the lie is the denial, the negation and the conscious and deliberate destruction of the reality which is created by God and which consists in God, no matter whether this purpose is achieved by speech or by silence."[2]

Now, if God may be described as "the truth" or the Genuine One, Satan

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may be described as the originator or "father of lies" (Jn 8:44), and he uses deceit to destroy. After all, to break with reality—morally, spiritually, psychologically, relationally—is destructive. Lying destroys oneself, one's relationships and one's connection to God.

One of the surest ways to destroy character is to engage in deception. Other sins and sinful patterns can more readily be addressed than deception. Deception, however, leads us away from reality so that the truth becomes increasingly elusive, which makes repentance and reconciliation elusive as well. The matter of truth and falsehood is the person's basic fault line, jeopardizing the stability of the well-being of one's character and relationships. A person's believability and integrity totters on deception, which holds all virtues hostage.

Not only does deceit quickly erode the character, it complicates problems rather than solves them. Mark Twain rightly said, "If you tell the truth, you don't have to remember anything." As Proverbs puts it, "Bread gained by deceit is sweet to a man, but afterward his mouth will be full of gravel" (Prov 20:17 RSV). Deceit fouls all relationships. Once a person has deceived another and is known to have done so, it is difficult ever to restore full confidence. One may attempt to counterbalance his lies with a greater number of truths, but it doesn't work that way. No amount of truth can quickly erase the indelible imprint of a lie, for the person who has been deceived may rightly ask himself, "When will it happen again?" Deceit is the ultimate destroyer of good relationships because good human relationships are built on mutual confidence (Prov 22:1).

Varieties of Deception

Lying without words. An averted glance, a "cool" attitude, a show of outrage can all be designed to mask the truth, to deceive by an expression, a demeanor or an act, with no recourse to words at all. One can deceive by silence. When another is falsely accused in the easy camaraderie of a gossipy circle of friends, is silence a less guilty offense against the truth?

Lying with true words. One can deceive using true words. For example, a person may quote another out of context and thus deceive as to the

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meaning of the original statement or deceive by telling only part of the truth, as Abraham did concerning his wife.

A more contemporary example of deception with true words: In a 1984 meeting of evangelical students from several seminaries, the speaker explained how the statements attributed to Christ by the Gospel writers were not always his own statements but were added later to make a point. Asked by the students if that approach would be accepted by people in the pew, he replied: "You have to be very careful. For example, you can say, 'The author in Mark's Gospel tells us that Jesus said . . . '" In this way, the faith of the layperson is not shaken, and the scholar speaking to these students has not affirmed, in words, either the authorship of Mark or the authenticity of what was attributed to Jesus. But he has deliberately deceived his hearers into thinking that he believes the same things his hearers do. And the students are thus encouraged by an "evangelical" scholar to carry out pastoral ministry in this manner.

Pretense and exaggeration. Pretending to have knowledge when one only thinks or feels or guesses is deception. This temptation is especially strong for the recognized expert—the teacher or physician, for example. After all, isn't it slightly embarrassing not to know about the latest groundbreaking book in your field?

Exaggeration is another form of lying that is a great temptation for Christian workers, especially when the time comes to write prayer letters to their supporters. They may be tempted to enhance their reputation by making results sound more glorious and spectacular than they actually are.

Culture and lying. When I (Robertson) was working with my colleagues to achieve accreditation for our Christian theological school in Japan, we were surely pursuing a good end for God's glory. But the professor in charge of the project constantly brought for my signature documents that were not factual. Finally in exasperation he exclaimed, "A lie may become the cross you must bear!" It fit well with the Japanese proverb "A lie also is a useful thing." When I still declined to sign, the professor gave up in disgust: "Your problem is that you haven't become accustomed to the Japanese way of doing things." Was this a mere clash of culture? Was God to be served best by deception in this cultural format? (I should add

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that he was the only Japanese colleague who held this position.)

Unfortunately, these sorts of tactics happen in the West as well. We are aware of evangelical leaders who have regularly engaged in strong-arming tactics, manipulation and deception. Their actions include spreading rumors, pressuring persons to fire persons without warrant, or even to take illegal actions—"for the glory of God," of course!

Though the temptation is present in *every* culture, it also must be acknowledged that the ethics of truth are complicated in crosscultural relationships. The Incas, who had capital punishment for three crimes—murder, adultery and lying—were easy prey to the Spaniards, who lied, again, "for the glory of God." Crosscultural communication of the truth is complicated by cultural differences, no doubt, but we are unaware of any biblical reason to modify the basic understanding of truth outlined above. The Japanese professor and the Spanish invaders were guilty of violating the truth. Indeed, Paul wrote to Titus in Crete that God "cannot lie"—in contrast to Cretans who were denounced by their fellow Cretan Epimenides, who said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons" (Tit 1:2, 12).

Motivation: Self-interest. "For the glory of God" is not the primary reason people lie; usually it is pure self-interest. At a men's retreat a young businessman sought me (Robertson) out. He and his wife had been deeply in debt when his father-in-law invited him to join the family business. It seemed God's own provision since his father-in-law had been a leader in a strong evangelical church for more than a quarter century. But now his conscience was troubling him. The only way a small business could survive in the American economic jungle, he was told, was to keep two sets of books, one for public inspection by government agents, and another set of true financial records at home. Was this all right? He was troubled, but not ready to risk a stand for the truth. When I returned to the church some years later, he and his father-in-law were still leaders in the same church and still in the same business, run in the same way.

Hypocrisy. The mature form of deceit is evidenced by a life of deceit, commonly called hypocrisy: seeking to appear something one is not. God hates hypocrisy, and of all hypocrisies, religious hypocrisy is the worst.

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When a wicked person engages in religious activity, it is not merely that God rejects such falsehood. God hates hypocrisy so intensely that the religious activity itself, instead of improving the situation of the unrepentant sinner, is actually an abomination to God. Far better to have had no religious activity at all (Prov 15:8; Amos 5:21-25).

The humble and gentle Jesus excoriated religious leaders of his day, who would "preach" but "not practice" (Mt 23:3). We can easily see hypocrisy in the Pharisees. We can see it in one correspondent who wrote in the old "Dear Abby" newspaper column that he was furious because the "A" student he solicited for help on his exam fed him the wrong answers. But do we see it in ourselves?

One international newspaper covered the story of a truck driver in Italy who routinely visited brothels while he was on the road:

> On one occasion an associate told him about the best brothel he had been to and whom he should ask for to receive the best service. He decided to follow up on the recommendation even though it was so close to home. When he arrived at the brothel he asked for the services of that particular prostitute and awaited her arrival. To his utter shock and anger, when the woman walked into the room he discovered she was his wife. He was enraged, realizing that while he had been on the road his wife had been making a living through prostitution. Totally out of control, he grabbed her and would have killed her had he not been restrained.[3]

We hate for our hypocrisies to be exposed, but coming to terms with our own deceptive hearts (Jer 17:9)—before God and others—as we confess and repent is crucial to our becoming conformed to Christ's image.

Self-deception. Hypocrisy is an attempt to deceive others, but it often stems from or is intertwined with a deeper malady: self-deception. We can be deceived about reality, convincing ourselves that we are better or worse than we really are. Both are equally dangerous and destructive. Lack of self-honesty can be profoundly damaging. Failures in self-honesty are at the root of many emotional and mental disturbances.

A particularly virulent strain of self-deception is the contemporary notion of what it means to be honest. A senior Bible student once came to me (Robertson) for counsel about an earlier immoral relationship with an

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unconverted man. We seemed to be getting nowhere, so I inquired: "Have you ever decided to finally break off all relations with him and have nothing to do with him ever again?" Her response revealed clearly the new concept of what integrity is: "That wouldn't be honest, would it?"

Or what of a certain man who has what he considers an attractive wife who has stood by him for thirty-five years and raised "five marvelous sons," but is no longer as sexually exciting to him as is a certain divorcée. What should he do? He concludes: "I have too much character to live a lie any longer."

As we have observed earlier, our feelings, which so often change, are not central to who we are. What about virtuous character, abiding commitments, self-control, doing what is right? Are all these negotiable if they go against feelings? To be honest to oneself means to be honest to one's *whole* self, to one's commitments, to one's sacred relationships, to God, to what is right, to reason, as well as to one's feelings. The most honest thing this man could do would be to reject his desires and feelings and act with true integrity to his marriage vows.

Hypocrisy is despicable, self-deception is malignant, and if they are not dealt with, a habitual liar may come to the place where he does not even recognize the truth. But are there ever any biblically permissible exceptions to consider when it comes to deception?

Exceptions: When Deception Is Permissible

Incomplete truth. The command of God to tell the truth does not mean that a person must tell all that she knows in every situation. A mother may not tell her small child everything she knows in answer to the question, "Where do babies come from?" When we turn to Scripture, we see that Christ did not tell his brothers all the truth concerning his intention to go to Jerusalem; the time had not yet come for him to do so, though he would go up shortly thereafter (Jn 7:8-10). God himself instructed Samuel, who was fearful of Saul's wrath, to say that he was going to Bethlehem to offer a sacrifice—even though the primary, and initial, reason was to anoint a new king (1 Sam 16:1-5). Jeremiah deceived through a similar method (Jer 38:24-27). In Christ there was no guile (1 Pet 2:22), and it is impossible for God to

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lie (Heb 6:18). Yet God himself does not tell the whole truth (Deut 29:29). He tells us only that portion of the truth which is necessary for our good.

We could say that God does allow people who suppress the truth to be reinforced in that suppression. Paul writes that for those who refuse to love the truth, God sends a delusion on them (2 Thess 2:11-12). In the same way, God had sent a deceiving spirit on false prophets because they only prophesied the happy things that king Ahab wants to hear rather than the truth (1 Kings 22).

As we have noted, one does not have to tell all he knows to speak the truth, but does this mean that deliberate deception is ever approved in Scripture? Just as killing does not always equal murder and taking by force does not always equal stealing, could it be said that deception is not always sinful?

The lesser of two evils? Some claim that deception is always wrong, but that it may be the lesser of two evils. For example, deceiving Nazis about the Jews you are hiding is wrong, but not as wrong as telling the fateful truth about their whereabouts. So the doctrine of tragic moral dilemma—the idea that we may sometimes need to sin by choosing the lesser of two unacceptable choices—is embraced by various Christians. The Christian who chooses the lesser of two evils is still guilty, regardless of motives, since the Bible allows no exceptions for deception—although the prohibition against killing, say, does permit exceptions for justified war or capital punishment.

Are there in fact *no* biblical exceptions to the law against deception? Before examining the biblical texts, we note two important facts. *The basic sin is deception, not merely the deliberate verbal expression of falsehood.* Words can be in conformity to facts and still be designed to deceive. Words can be apparently out of conformity with the facts and be true. My (Robertson's) young son was to drop a letter in a mail slot for me and asked, "To America or Japan?" Although the destination was in Tachikawa, Japan, I replied, "America." No amount of explaining would have conveyed the truth that an APO address had to go in the "America" slot to reach a destination in Japan. I answered (truthfully) his question, not his words. I did not deceive him.

The other ground rule we follow is to recognize that Scripture must be our

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guide, and that cuts both ways. If Scripture truly prohibits any exceptions, then we must allow none, no matter how poignant the circumstances. But if Scripture justifies exceptions to any law or principle, then we must not try to be "more spiritual" than Scripture.

Our contention is that the Bible *does* justify deception in three categories: inconsequential social arrangements, war and opposition to criminal activity. If these exceptions are valid biblically, then to deceive in these circumstances in any way, including verbally, is no evil to be confessed, but legitimate moral behavior. That is, our duties should be understood in terms of a hierarchy or an ordering of obligations. If two come into conflict—say, our duty to love God and our duty to love family—we must choose the higher. Likewise, as we note below, when we must choose between saving life and telling the truth, we save a life.

Inconsequential social arrangements. When Christ acted as if he would go on, but did not intend to (Lk 24:28-29), he was displaying modesty, not forcing his presence on his two friends but giving them opportunity to freely invite him in.[4] Jesus instructed his disciples to use a little "makeup," so as not to appear as if they had been fasting (Mt 6:17-18); he apparently did not consider this sinful deception. Though the Bible does not tell jokes as such or instruct in ancient games, these would seem to fall in the same category of mutually agreed-on social arrangements. The unexpected ending is what makes a joke funny; so the more the audience is led astray (deceived), the better the punch line. The better his ability to deceive, the better the quarterback, chess player or actor in a play.

Many of our greetings and social expressions are of this nature. Those who lay heavy burdens of explicit veracity on casual social exchange do not help the cause of truth. One should adapt even common salutations to conform as much as possible with reality. When the other person asks, "How are you?" unless he stops and makes a point of it, no one really thinks he wants a clinical description of body or psyche. We might be more comfortable with a response of "Learning and growing" or "I'm sure I'll survive," and while these might contain slight content, they are no more moral than the more common and meaningless response, "Fine" or "Doing okay." To impose on humor, games or casual social greetings the requirements of the

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ninth commandment is not to serve the cause of truth; actually it trivializes the weighty demands of biblical integrity.

If the biblical evidence for legitimate deception in inconsequential social arrangements is not abundant, either for or against (possibly for the very reason that it *is* inconsequential), this lack cannot be alleged against the case for deception in war.

Deception in war. War by its very nature is waged with an array of available weapons, including psychology and deception. God himself wages war this way. He not only told Joshua to set an ambush (Josh 8:2), a very deadly deception, but he himself set an ambush on at least one occasion (2 Chron 20:22). Elisha and God worked together on a project in which the prophet told the enemy troops, "This is not the way and this is not the city," when in fact it *was* the city. In addition, God instructed Moses to send spies—the quintessential form of deception—into the land of Canaan (Num 13:2). Likewise, two Israelite spies went to Jericho, where Rahab, in spy-thriller fashion, hid the spies and deceived the home troops (Josh 6:2-6). For this act she was commended and rewarded by God (Heb 11:31; Jas 2:25).

Some have argued that Rahab was commended for her *faith,* not for her deceptive activity. Apart from the fact that all three of the relevant passages say explicitly that it was *because* of what she did that she was commended (Jas 2:25), how is it possible so to divorce faith and works? A dangerous theological notion with unending potential for mischief is introduced if one may deliberately do a sinful act for a good cause and be rewarded for her faith. If a person *sins,* should she not be *reprimanded* rather than *rewarded*—especially when the act is designed to save her own skin? No, Rahab acted in the faith that the God who was with Israel was mightier than the gods of Jericho, and she did the right thing—she sided with God's people and deceived through actions and words in what may properly be called an act of war. Others have argued that the hiding of the spies was acceptable but that she sinned when she spoke untrue words. But this is an inadmissible definition of the sin of deception and opens the door to all kinds of theological vagaries in which words are sacrosanct but actions are not.

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If there can be just wars, as we have argued in chapter twenty-four ("War and Peace"), then ambushes, camouflage, spying, deceptive strategy and communicating in code, as integral parts of such wars, are also legitimate.

Deception in opposing criminals. Deception is apparently one form of resistance that, like physical resistance, is ordinarily wrong, but not wrong in resisting a criminal or an enemy in war.

Consider the classic question: "Are you morally obligated to tell the Gestapo at the door that you are harboring Jews in your cellar?" We answer, "No." Sophie Scholl, a committed Christian and university student was an active participant in "The White Rose"—a German resistance movement during World War II.[5] She and her friends devoted their lives to exposing the Nazis' propaganda and lies by quietly publicizing the truth to her fellow Germans. When she, along with her brother, was caught (February 18, 1943) and interrogated, she sought to deceive her interrogators to protect her innocent comrades-in-arms. But when she was found out, she nevertheless refused to say anything that might endanger her friends—and she did right. In Scripture, we see the Hebrew midwives resisting an ungodly and oppressive regime by civil disobedience and the use of deception. The result? "God dealt well with the midwives" (Ex 1:15-21 RSV). How can it be said that their faith was good and their subversive activity bad? Or how can it be said that their disobedience was good and their deception bad? The Bible does not make such distinctions. It just says that God approved and rewarded.

The philosopher Immanuel Kant insisted that if an axe-murderer is running after someone and he asks you where the threatened person went, you are to tell the would-be murderer the truth if you know it. If the criminal then finds him and kills him, the criminal would be to blame, not you. Kant thought that if deception was wrong because, if universalized, then what would be the point of lying? We would insist that certain contexts such as criminal activity—not just any activity—allow for deception.

And as we noted above, *God himself* suggested deception, if necessary (1 Sam 16:1-5). God had told Samuel to anoint a king, and Samuel replied that if the jealous, ruthless and irrational king Saul heard of it, he would kill Samuel. God gave this advice to him: "Take a heifer with you

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and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the LORD'" (1 Sam 16:2). God urged Samuel to deceive anyone who asked. Because Saul was a standing threat to the innocent lives, he had *forfeited the right* to full or even partial disclosure of what Samuel was doing. King Ahab's own steward Obadiah, who "feared the LORD greatly," acted deceptively by hiding a hundred prophets in caves because their lives were under threat by queen Jezebel (1 Kings 18:3-4).

How about in our own situation? If a homeowner, away on a trip, leaves a timer on her light system to deceive potential robbers into thinking that she is home, surely she does not sin. Deceptive police activity is a good thing when needed to apprehend a criminal—for example, sting operations to break up drug or prostitution rings. When a robber demands entrance to a home, or access to possessions or people within, and he can be deflected by deception (with true words or false words), the deceiver has not chosen the lesser of two evils, but has done right.

Note that we are not justifying these deceptions on the grounds of situationism (that acts are right or wrong based solely on the situation), deciding for ourselves which course of action is the more loving for the most people. Nor are we saying that both courses of action are sinful and that one must sometimes make a tragic moral choice (and choosing to lie over letting another be murdered, for example). No, we are saying that deception is sinful, except those situations in which Scripture itself permits or advocates deception—and which are also very much in keeping with reason: inconsequential social arrangements, war and criminal resistance. In the instances cited, God himself either took the deceptive action, commanded it, or is said to have approved of those who did.

We must think holistically about moral acts. Not only can *acts themselves* be right or wrong (e.g., the act of rape or baby torture is always wrong); *motives* can render an act good or evil. For example, two acts can be identical, but the motives may differ. Furthermore, the *character* of a person is the fountain from which virtuous (or vicious) actions flow. And the Scriptures cite examples of God-fearing persons whose lives are marked by integrity, out of which comes an occasional deception to protect innocent life. Deception does not characterize their lives, but evil persons can un-

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dermine the proper place for truth-telling. In the astute words of Glen Stassen and David Gushee, "Those . . . who are threatened and oppressed may be permitted in times of moral emergency to suspend truthtelling temporarily in some contexts in order to honor central covenant obligations—and to work clandestinely, if necessary, for a just and peaceful public square in which truth may be freely spoken once again."[6]

One does not make exception to Scripture's commands or prohibitions on the basis of what may appear merely "loving" or "reasonable." If exceptions are made, we should be guided by Scripture itself, which serves as a safeguard against rationalization and corruption of character. We have already seen that the command to honor parents has exceptions (e.g., when it conflicts with allegiance to Christ) as does the command not to commit adultery (e.g., if one is raped). And when we come to exceptions concerning deception, we have more abundant evidence furnished by Scripture.

A further consideration: we have seen that when it comes to truth-telling and deception, we must not only consider the act itself, but the character, motive and context (such as warfare or criminal activity) involved. In defending deception in certain circumstances, this is no justification for lying when you've gotten yourself into trouble. The adulterer who thinks he is preserving his marriage by not telling his wife of his betrayal is misguided. As Lewis Smedes points out: "[This] would turn adultery itself into its own justification for lying. Since adultery always threatens to destroy a marriage, lying about it is almost always required to save the marriage. So the offense itself guarantees the 'right to lie.' The irony is too great."[7]

We recognize that the permissibility of deception is a debated topic, and that godly, fair-minded believers disagree. But let us return to the main burden of this chapter—that God is the ultimate reality around whom all else holds together. To depart from the truth and to live according to a self-distorted reality destroys our own personal integrity and our relationships and leads to death now and in the hereafter. But we find abundant life and true integrity or wholeness by orienting our lives around the reality of the triune God. This is the beginning of wisdom.

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PART X

CHRISTIANS AND SOCIETY

We have examined a wide range of ethical considerations, using the structure of the Ten Commandments to guide us. At this point, we come to some themes that are less clear in Scripture and can be quite controversial—the Christian and society, matters of conscience, and personal guidance.

In part ten, we will discuss questions about the church (a divine institution) and its relationship to the state (also divinely instituted): What responsibility do individual Christians and the church have beyond modeling and teaching ethical behavior? What biblical justification is there for having a voice in the public square and influencing society? Are there biblical principles to guide us through the complexities of private and public, church and state? How should Christians think about and engage with institutions within society, such as educational structures and the media?

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29

Church and State

Throughout the history of the church, people have debated the question of whether it is legitimate to work toward Christianizing society. During the Reagan era the debate heated up again. Some decried "politicizing religion" or "religionizing politics." Others wedded church and state with enthusiasm. But how should we approach the relationship of church and state? If we are citizens of God's kingdom, are expressions of patriotism wrong? Should we have the American flag and the Christian flag in the front of our churches, or does this send mixed messages about the nature of the gospel? And can we actually neatly separate the church or religion from the state or the secular?

Aristotle said that human beings are political animals. And whatever our position about the Christian's place in society, we cannot be neutral about the issue. Whether we believe we should withdraw to form our own separate subcultures (as the Amish) or to be actively involved to influence the political climate, we will take a stance. To assume we are not "taking a position" is itself a particular position, presumably held for a particular reason. If we pursue political engagement, what stance should the Christian take on a range of issues? These include "reproductive rights," race, redistribution of wealth, a guaranteed livelihood and arms control (issues typically advocated by "liberals" or "progressives") as well as the rights of the unborn, law and order, pornography, the traditional family, a healthy defense budget, or human rights in China or in Muslim countries (typically "conservative" issues).

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Biblical Context

Two texts. Before we talk about the role of government and church and state matters, we should go back to the Sermon on the Mount, which has relevance here—particularly Matthew 7:6-11:

> Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces. Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!

For a long time, biblical scholars were not quite sure how this text fit with the rest of the Sermon on the Mount. When we looked at life issues, we noted the theme of "transforming initiatives" in the Sermon on the Mount—that Jesus calls his disciples to break out of vicious cycles that lead to a dead-end lifestyle and to embrace kingdom values that move toward reconciled relationships and cultivating life-giving patterns.

This helps shed light on this passage as it relates to the Christian disciple and government.[1] In early rabbinic literature, "pigs" and "dogs" were "Gentiles"; in Jesus' day, Jews would have thought of Rome when they heard these terms. While Jewish zealots in Jesus' day opposed Rome as the root of Israel's problems, the opposite idolatrous temptation existed—namely, placing trust and hope in Rome for political and economic security. To idolize earthly governments, however, is a vicious cycle, a dead-end path that leads to disappointment and even betrayal—just like "pigs" trample pearls (which look like grain) and "dogs" tear you apart. It's something like Winston Churchill's definition of an "appeaser"—"one who feeds a crocodile, hoping it will eat him last."

What is Jesus' alternative to idolizing government? He said earlier that we should seek first God's kingdom (Mt 6:33)—to trust and seek our heavenly Father, who has our best interests in mind; he will not turn against us (see table 29.1).

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Table 29.1. Transforming Initiative from Matthew 7:6-12

Traditional Righteousness	Vicious Cycle	Transforming Initiative
Do not give holy things to dogs, or pearls to pigs (Mt 7:6-12).	They will trample them and tear you to pieces.	*Give your trust in prayer to your Father in Heaven.*

An additional text to consider is Matthew 22:17-22. Religious leaders were testing Jesus with a question about paying taxes. Would Jesus say "yes" to Caesar and "no" to God—or vice versa? Jesus requested a coin be brought to him, and he asked, "Whose likeness [*eikōn*] and inscription is this?" The reply was, "Caesar's." Jesus then told his questioners to give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. Jesus was not talking about some implied "church-state" separation here, which was a foreign concept in the days of the Roman Empire; Jesus wasn't saying, "Caesar gets his share and God gets his." Harking back to Genesis 1, Jesus appears to be saying that, yes, coins bear the image of Caesar and taxes should be paid to him. But all humans—including Caesar!—are made in the *image* and *likeness* of God (Gen 1:26-27), and *everything* we have belongs to God the Creator. He is master over Caesar and over our money, including tax money.

Scripture, idolatry and "returning to Christian America." We hear in the Matthew 7 text a rebuke to those who want to clutch whatever remains of our past "Christian consensus" and press for a "return to Christian America." This kind of language could sound threatening to Americans who are not Christians. For one thing, various American founders such as Thomas Jefferson and Ben Franklin, though sympathetic to the influence of biblical religion, were Deists, not Christians. And in America's early history, the Protestant majority of Puritans, Congregationalists and Presbyterians opposed and oppressed Quakers such as Mary Dyer, Baptists such as Roger Williams, and Roman Catholics.

Many American Christians will invoke 2 Chronicles 7:14 on the National Day of Prayer: "If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves . . ." (NIV). But who are God's people? The American nation? Or is it the church in America? Often Christians blur these lines between God's people and the American nation, suggesting the doctrine known as "Manifest Destiny." As the Puritans intended it, America was to carry

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forward the Reformation in its pure form, being a "city set on a hill."

What should we make of the language of "returning to Christian America"? Is it idolatrous? Not necessarily. *Culturally* speaking, the Christian faith has been the source of many benefits that have come to Western civilization—human rights, women's rights, abolition of slavery, democracy, modern science. These are hard-fought benefits that that have contributed to human well-being, and they should be preserved and defended. However, if we are referring to *Christian government* or *Christian civil religion,* this can sound intimidating to the non-Christian citizen—and it can be idolatrous. Christians should be careful here: America is not a theocracy like ancient Israel, and Christ's kingdom is "not of this world" (Jn 18:36). Even though Paul regularly appealed to his Roman citizenship, as we note below, he also wrote that our ultimate citizenship is in heaven (Phil 3:20). Peter reminds believers that they are "aliens and strangers" (1 Pet 2:11-12).

This "nostalgia for the lost empire" is idolatrous because of its desire for and reliance on majority status. While Christians are to have an influence as salt and light in society (Mt 5:13-16), they may be in grave danger of idolatry by putting trust in the horses and chariots of majoritarianism rather than in God himself. As John Seel writes, this majoritarianism is actually coercive and insensitive to political and theological differences; it is "blind to such principles as the common good and minority rights, which balances the bare expression of the will of the majority."[2] American Christians must recognize their first duty is to love God and others, whether they have political power or not, and to be salt and light in a rotting and darkened world.

This is not to say that Christians shouldn't influence society and the shaping of its laws for the common good. In fact, Western history bears the stamp of Christian influence.

The Stream of History

For the first three centuries of its existence the church proclaimed the gospel and was heavily involved in social concerns—but without the government's blessing. In fact, Christians were often excluded from public life

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through social pressure and lived under intense persecution. Nevertheless, they were widely recognized for almsgiving (even the poor gave generously through frugality ["stinting"] and fasting), support of widows and orphans (pagan emperor Julian said, "These godless Galileans feed not only their own poor but ours"), care for the sick and disabled (establishing the first hospitals in the fourth century), care for prisoners and slaves (some Christians sold themselves into bondage to buy the freedom of others), providing work for the unemployed, caring for those suffering calamity (in times of plague only Christians continued to care for the dying) and providing hospitality to those on journeys.

The second-century *Epistle to Diognetus* describes the attractive moral example set by the Christian community in the Mediterranean world. It stands as a rebuke to many morally compromised Western churches and denominations today. The letter observes how these Christians were not distinct in their dress, food or speech, but they "display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life":

> They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers. They marry, as do all [others]; they beget children; but they do not destroy their offspring. They have a common table, but not a common bed. They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives. They love all men, and are persecuted by all. They are unknown and condemned; they are put to death, and restored to life. They are poor, yet make many rich; they are in lack of all things, and yet abound in all; they are dishonored, and yet in their very dishonor are glorified. They are evilly spoken of, and yet are justified; they are reviled, and bless; they are insulted, and repay the insult with honor; they do good, yet are punished as evildoers. When punished, they rejoice as if quickened into life.[3]

With the ascent of Emperor Constantine (312), the Christian outcast minority would become part of "the establishment." Though various critics have spoken ill of Constantine, we should not diminish his historical sig-

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nificance and the blessing he was to many Christians. Surely Constantine's rule was a massive *relief* to a once persecuted minority. After all, believers have a duty to pray for rulers, allowing them to lead peaceable and quiet lives—instead of being harassed and persecuted (1 Tim 2:1-4; cf. Rev 6:10). These believers were rightly grateful for a ruler who kept Romans from killing Christians! Jesus himself came to deliver people from all manner of oppression and bondage (Lk 4:18-19). And we should remember that political or cultural power is not inherently evil (Rom 13).

Christians under Constantine began to wrestle with what it meant to have "dual citizenship" in a heavenly kingdom *and* an earthly one. This was a totally new experiment. Paganism was waning, and Christians were trying to fill the vacuum and figure out how to run things. What's more, Constantine was not an oppressor of pagans. And he actually brought about many positive moral reforms—banning the gladiatorial games and the exposure of children as well as preventing men and women from being put into the same prison cells, for instance. He also encouraged charitable ministries that benefited everyone, not just Christians. This isn't to say that the church wouldn't make grievous mistakes with the power that it had (e.g., the Inquisition).

Constantine has been painted with a black brush by thinkers such as John Howard Yoder (who adopts an Anabaptist perspective). He refers to the "heresy" of *Constantinianism*—a term referring to the church's taking a dominant cultural place in the Roman Empire. Allegedly, the church fell from its "pristine" existence as a dynamic, though politically disempowered, community. It capitulated and compromised as it came to operate according to the idolatrous machinery of political power, including Christian involvement in the military. Although we can't explore Yoder's argument here (though we addressed some of Yoder's concerns in chapter twenty-four), his reference to the church's "Constantinian shift" is highly questionable; it is historically flawed and theologically inaccurate. For example, as we saw in our discussion of warfare, the New Testament speaks quite positively of Roman centurions, and Christians were involved in the military in some capacity up to the time of Constantine, not simply after he came to power.[4]

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Eventually, the state would come to control the church, but over the centuries the church came to control—or at least to excessively manipulate—the state. For example, Pope Gregory VII (reigned 1073–1085) asserted: "The pope alone may use the imperial insignia; all princes should kiss his feet and his alone; he may depose emperors; he may absolve the subjects of wicked rulers from their allegiance." An additional problem to a history of popes who called for the allegiance of secular rulers in Europe, many of these religious leaders led scandalous lives and proved that power does tend to corrupt. The marriage of a corrupted church and state, in what came to be called "state churches," inspired the outrage against them both in the French Revolution (1789) and the reign of terror. The French Enlightenment figure Denis Diderot captured this animosity succinctly: "I should like to see, and this will be the last and most *ardent* of my *desires*, I should like to see the last king *strangled* with the *guts* of the last *priest*."

With the Reformers came the belief in the separation of civil and religious government—although John Calvin in Geneva and John Knox (c. 1505–1572) in Scotland saw a blurring of these powers. Calvin permitted the execution of the heretic Michael Servetus, and John Knox influenced the Scottish Parliament to declare Scotland Protestant and to approve the Scots Confession in 1560. The Anabaptists went even further, insisting that civil government was only for non-Christians and that Christians should remain outside these worldly systems. This position is maintained today by some of their spiritual descendants, such as the Amish and some Mennonites. It influences others strongly, so that Baptists of all varieties strongly emphasize the separation of church and state.

Perhaps one point of clarification here about post-Reformation "religious wars" of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe: The Enlightenment (1650–1800), particularly in France, opposed the dominance of the "state church." Prior to the rise of modernity in the West, church and state had been bound together. Indeed, as we observe below, we cannot tidily separate "religion" and "politics" or the "sacred" and the "secular." It was the Enlightenment that helped create a sacred-secular dichotomy, and secularists often lay claim to the influence of the "rational, tolerant Enlightenment" that stood in opposition to Europe's religious wars during the

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post-Reformation era. As William Cavanaugh points out, the *church's political power* came to be replaced by the *state's political power,* and the twentieth century showed that state power can be just as—or even more—tyrannical. Cavanaugh says that the "religious wars" were very much an exercise of European state building. In fact, the boundaries of these alleged religious wars were drawn primarily along *political* lines rather than those of sectarian affiliation.[5]

Nevertheless, the dominant Protestant Reformation teaching was not for separation of *influence,* but for separation of the *powers* of each so that neither controlled the other. Church and state were viewed as partners in separate but overlapping spheres of responsibility for achieving God's purposes in the world. During the eighteenth century, England was ripe for spiritual revival and eventually social transformation through the preaching of George Whitefield and John Wesley. They brought their message to America's shores, which, in combination with Jonathan Edwards's preaching, would help inspire America's first Great Awakening. This movement is often held up as a model of how Christian people can change the course of government and national destiny. Indeed, in our day, the Christian statesman Os Guinness makes the argument that the American church's awakening or revival is the only hope to reverse the country's moral and spiritual decline.[6]

British politics between 1750 and 1850 was dominated by Anglican evangelicals, many of whom came out of the Wesleyan revival. The "saints," or "Clapham Sect," met in the home of Henry Thornton and hammered out the most formidable pressure group Britain has ever seen. William Wilberforce, Granville Sharp, Thomas Clarkson, Zachary Macaulay and Lord Shaftesbury determined to cure their land's moral evils. They brought about the abolition of slavery, fought for humanization of factories and prisons and the relief of debtors, and opposed all discrimination against minorities. Sunday was firmly established as a day of rest, and the national lottery was abolished. Bearbaiting, bullbaiting and cockfighting were stopped. Even profanity and adultery were legislated against.

How did they do it? They sought to mobilize every possible force. They used *political action.* Some who were not authorities in certain fields made

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themselves authorities in order to be effective. By 1815 half the peerage had given up their old amusements of the hunt and ball and devoted themselves to setting up Bible study groups. They used *money.* Through the fundraising efforts of the Clapham Sect, the African colony of Sierra Leone was founded in 1787 as a home for freed slaves and was privately sustained for twenty years. They supported *evangelism.* The Clapham Sect, distressed that the giant East India Company banned missionary activity in India, bought up stock and took over the entire directorate of the company for the purpose of opening India to the gospel. They used *boycott.* Hannah More, called "the high priestess of the Evangelical Revival," persuaded "ladies of gentility" to abstain from using West Indies sugar in their tea as part of the overall antislavery campaign. In fact, the evangelicals' greatest weapon was *the influencing of public opinion.* They held public campaigns that succeeded in reversing the value system of an entire people in less than a generation.[7]

Church and State in America

The colonies in North America fell heir to the Protestant heritage of England and Scotland. The country's founders were concerned about the separation of powers—that neither should dominate or control the other. They expressed two fundamental, but competing, concerns: first, that government should not sponsor religion, and second, that government should not impede its expression: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof," the First Amendment states.

A certain irony exists in Thomas Jefferson's "wall of separation between church and state" language from an 1801 letter to the Danbury Baptists; this letter concerned the fact that all non-Congregationalists in Connecticut had to pay an assessment tax. But apart from that, complete religious freedom existed for these churches, and the Danbury Baptists themselves thought it a good idea that the government should accommodate and encourage religious structures—hardly a compartmentalized separation![8] Jefferson's intent was to assure this religious group that they were not excluded from having a rightful place in the public square.

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Since Supreme Court justice Hugo Black appealed to the "wall" argument in the 1940s, secularists such as the Freedom from Religion Association have used this language to treat the Christian faith—and other faiths—as a private practice that should have no influence beyond the four walls of a church building. In such organizations we often witness a fanatical desire to expunge from our nation's history any reference to clear and strong religious influences; this kind of censorship has been common in student textbooks, for example.[9] But while some measure of church-state separation is healthy, it is bad practice to base such an argument on a personal letter from Jefferson rather than on defining documents such as the Declaration of Independence, the founders' speeches and writings, and the various state constitutions.

Jefferson himself, though a Deist, wrote the Declaration, in which he mentioned the "Creator," "the Supreme Judge," "Divine Providence" and "Nature's God." He also affirmed the theological grounding of God for human rights: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

"Life," we understand, and "liberty" as well. But "the pursuit of happiness"? The founders closely connected "happiness" and "liberty." According to historian David McCullough, the "pursuit of happiness" did not mean for the founders "long vacations or material possessions or idleness or ease." No, it meant the life of the mind and spirit, the liberty to think for oneself, to engage in intellectual pursuits. For George Washington in particular, "happiness derived both from learning and employing the benefits of learning to further the welfare of others."[10]

Furthermore, the founding fathers themselves (and their contemporaries) did not at all view religion and government as absolutely compartmentalized. Far from it. Indeed, they were emphatic about the importance of religion for public life. George Washington claimed that "Religion and Morality are the essential pillars of Civil society." In his farewell address of 1796, he stated that "reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle." And that "religion and morality are indispensable supports" of the "dispositions and

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habits which lead to political prosperity." In 1798, America's second President, John Adams said something similar: "We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion," adding that our Constitution "was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other." Further, God is explicitly mentioned in the *preambles of the states' constitutions.* Connecticut's, for example, mentions "the good providence of God," and Massachusetts expresses gratitude for "the goodness of the great Legislator of the universe."

Clearly, an absolute church-state separation was never intended. For example, article seven of the Constitution declares that "no religious test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States." J. Budziszewski, professor of philosophy and government at the University of Texas at Austin, gives us the upshot of the Constitution on the church-state issue: government isn't allowed to make officeholders pass a religious test, establish a national church, or stop someone from freely worshiping.[11]

While church and state are separate, faith is not to be separated from public life. If the separation between church and state were absolute, there would be some silly consequences, as the Supreme Court noted in 1947. Firefighters couldn't put out burning church buildings or religious schools, or if the president was injured, he couldn't be admitted to a religious hospital. Churches couldn't be opened to the community in cases of emergency. Indeed, early in our country's history, religious services could be held in federal buildings, and church buildings would often serve as town meeting houses.

The "wall argument" assumes that atheism or secular humanism is the default position. But this is a full-fledged worldview or philosophy of life—complete with beliefs about reality (metaphysics), ethics, knowledge (epistemology) and the purpose of life—just as the Christian or Sikh faith is. It is not neutral in its beliefs. To say that God does not exist (which atheism does) is to make a claim which stands in need of justification. To prefer an atheistic worldview is not a neutral assertion. In fact, secular humanist societies have 501c3 tax-exempt status just as churches do.

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The clear intent of the First Amendment was to keep the federal government from creating a state church on the European model, which would have forced the individual states to relinquish their respective established churches then in place. Many of the colonies had state churches, but of different denominations. The founders did not oppose that, for those churches continued in the new republic for some decades. But they did not look benevolently on the potential power of a monolithic national church.

The First Amendment allows for freedom *of* religion as well as freedom *from* religion—that people should not be coerced by religion; and so the government may not *establish* religion. Yet historically, government structures have encouraged the flourishing of religion—from the Declaration of Independence and the preambles of state constitutions to chaplains in the military, national days of prayer and prayer breakfasts, and references to God in speeches. But people should be free to practice their religion—and so the government should not interfere.

Whatever the attitude or intention toward "church" may have been, it is clear that the prevailing consensus of a religiously based, biblical ethic was viewed as essential to the success of the fledgling experiment in democracy. Thus a moral consensus dominated the making and interpreting of the law well into the twentieth century. But the landscape has been changing, both in America and in Western Europe.

In Western Europe, we are seeing tensions developing between traditional European cultures and growing Islamic populations. Increasingly, Muslims have rejected these national constitutions and laws by setting up their own parallel sharia courts, conducting their own polygamous marriages (supported at taxpayer expense), practicing female circumcision and wife-beating, and forcing women into marriages.[12] Relativistic multiculturalists are at a loss about how to combat such assaults on human rights, and they are all the more timid because of the volatility of many of these Muslim communities and the pressure—even intimidation—they exert. Some European countries such as Belgium have penalties for "hate speech," which prohibit any criticism of Islam. For the major schools of Islam, there has been no "mosque-state" separation, historically as well as today.

In America, the government early on seemed to favor the rights of reli-

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gious people to freely practice and promote their religion, whereas recently the courts, at least, have favored the rights of citizens to be protected *from* religion. Church-state entanglement still exists, but today it tends more toward *inhibiting* the church. Not only are churches increasingly denied previously granted privileges, but the direction seems to be toward isolation of religion from public space altogether—what Richard John Neuhaus called "the naked public square."[13] In the next chapter, we explore various arrangements and tensions on the church-state question.

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Alternative Approaches to the Church-State Relationship

It is possible to arrange the relationship between church and state in various ways: state controls church; church controls state; church and state are assigned mutually exclusive roles; or church and state have distinct spheres of responsibility but with mutual respect and negotiated authority and influence.

In historic fact, no arrangement seems to have been "pure"; there has always been some spillover in the outworking of whatever arrangement was officially prescribed. The Bible gives no mandate but does give instruction on the purpose of the church and the purpose of human government. So we conclude that the best arrangement is that which provides maximum freedom for each to do best what it is designed to do. But discovering the ideal arrangement is not easy. There seems to be only so much space in which social institutions may operate. And as a result, when the authority (or freedom or "rights") of one expands, that of the other tends to contract. As the sphere of government control expands over the lives of its people, for example, the freedom of other social institutions to speak or act with independent authority diminishes. What are the various arrangements?

State Controls Church

When human government aims to control the religious life of the people, the result has rarely been to the benefit of religious life. Likewise, when

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professing Christians become authoritarian rulers and punish theological dissenters, as in the Inquisition, they bind the freedom of conscience of others.

Church Dominates State

The church dominated the state for a few centuries in medieval Europe, and though a few people advocate it today, it is not likely to happen in democratic lands of the twenty-first century. In most Muslim countries, religious freedom is limited or nonexistent.[1] And all four major schools of Islam endorse capital punishment for apostates from Islam.

As for the professed fears of secularists that Christian "fundamentalists" intend to impose a rightist totalitarian regime with coercive moral requirements, this is not even a remote possibility. Of course, no person or group of people in a modern pluralistic democracy should impose its will on an unwilling majority—or even on a largely unwilling minority, for that matter. Most politically conservative Christians (the Baptists in particular) come from a tradition of rigid church-state separation. The Roman Catholic document *Dignitatis Humanae* (1965) endorses religious liberty and gives guidelines for the church's relation to secular states, pluralistic states and officially Catholic states.

What about *theonomy* ("God's law")—the view advocated by a minority of Reformed, postmillennial evangelicals such as Rousas Rushdoony, Gary North and Greg Bahnsen? This view advocates a strong continuity between Old and New Testament, affirming that the law given at Mt. Sinai is universal and thus should be the law of *every* nation. Theonomists assume that since government is so important to human well-being, God would have made clear what kind of government he wants. God does this in the Old Testament with the law of Moses. A key passage they use is Matthew 5:17-20, where Jesus speaks of fulfilling rather than abolishing the Law and the Prophets. Theonomists misread this passage (see our discussion of "law" in part two), and they seem to collapse church and state—or at least create confusion about their roles in the new covenant era. Indeed, the New Testament has precious few passages on statecraft, and it certainly takes no pains to universalize the Mosaic law for all nations. As we've seen, the Old

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Testament does not universalize the law of Moses for all nations; rather, God holds these nations accountable for violating basic moral laws (e.g., Amos 1–2). In fact, we regularly read that Christians are "not under law" (Rom 6:14-15; Gal 4:21; 5:18). Furthermore, one could make the argument that *health* or *economics* is "*very* important," but the Bible does not lay out a specific economic system or medical instructions. God does, however, give us what is sufficient for our salvation and Christian living. Furthermore, God has given humans the capacity to utilize general revelation—reason, creation, conscience and human experience—to discern how God's world works and how best we can get along in it (cf. Is 28:23-29).[2]

Even if the church or church people could control government, it would not be a good thing. Religious totalitarianism is no better than secular totalitarianism, which is becoming an increasing threat in the West. Inquisitions are not the exclusive domain of one particular brand of religion. If Christ's kingdom is not of this world and, given the recent trends insisting on the unacceptability of church dominance in the affairs of state, should we advocate for a position in which church and state have mutually exclusive roles—a totally secular state in which religion is hermetically sealed off and totally private?

Church and State Assigned Mutually Exclusive Roles

Despite their worldview differences, both secularists of all varieties and certain Christians would like to wall off from public life all religious influence. Should Christians be *isolated,* focusing on the "spiritual" and "moral" dimensions—namely, evangelizing unbelievers, strengthening believers and living morally exemplary lives? While we disagree with this view, we acknowledge that if we were part of a small Christian minority in a Muslim land, we might prefer absolute isolation of the majority "church" influence from the political process. We would probably prefer a secular state if it were benevolently neutral toward religion in general, as with Singapore under Lee Kwan Yew. But as we live in a nation with strong Protestant roots, we cannot be certain what position we might espouse under other circumstances. This inner tension highlights the impossibility of final resolution on the entire issue of church-state relationships because God

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has not revealed the preferred arrangement. Possibly he has not done so because there is no ideal arrangement for fallen humankind.

In any event, some Christians are not the only ones who hold that church and state have mutually exclusive roles. Many secularists are militant in this position, and their viewpoint seems increasingly to prevail.

In a "secular state" the government and all political processes are kept separate from religion and even from religious influence. This is a separation not known in the earlier days of the republic in which government was favorable toward religion and open to religious influence but was benevolently neutral toward any specific Christian denomination. Later this neutrality came to include all religions. But the emerging "secular" state is no longer merely nonreligious but increasingly irreligious and even antireligious.

We seem to be moving toward the awkward position that the government cannot support values in the framework of any traditional religion (either Protestant, Catholic or Jewish), but it will support them in a humanistic framework. Thus, the practical effect, as we have seen, is to make humanism an established religion.[3]

Increasing numbers of the intellectual elite are espousing a "libertarian" view—the theory that government has no business legislating any moral standards—including drug use and prostitution—except to prevent a person from harming others. John Stuart Mill makes this point in his book *On Liberty* (1859): "The sole end for which mankind is warranted individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number, is self-protection. The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others."[4]

In this case, the government is made up of human beings whose values and ideals determine the laws of that people. This sense of "what ought to be" comes from the entire cultural milieu, but most of all from the religious convictions of the people. Indeed, the word *culture* is connected to the word *cult*—the religious core that gives shape to a society. Therefore, on the face of it, though the church and the state can be completely separated organizationally so that the church is prohibited from doing anything of-

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ficially in the public domain, the so-called private religious (or irreligious) convictions of the people will still determine the final outcome of the rules people live by.

Richard John Neuhaus argues this position persuasively in his highly influential volume *The Naked Public Square.* A common assumption in American society is that religion and religiously based morality are a private affair—something between the individual and her God that has no business out in the public square. Public, checkable "facts" are distinct from private, inscrutable "values." However, history bears out the well-established point that most Americans have derived their moral values and ideals from the biblical tradition, yet the direction of our public life ignores this basic reality.[5] So the deinstitutionalizing of religious truth claims "sounds like a fine and liberating thing, until we recognize that it really means the reduction of all moral claims to individualistic passion. Then indeed every question of value is dissolved into a question of power."[6] This "new pluralism" prompts the argument that "no normative ethic, even of the vaguest and most tentative sort, can be 'imposed' in our public life. In practice this means that public policy decisions reflect a surrender of the normal to the abnormal, of the dominant to the deviant." So no wonder terms such as *abnormal* or *deviant* "have been largely exorcised from polite vocabulary among the elites in American life."[7] Neuhaus continues by noting that teachers may freely espouse atheism as well as every manner of sexual deviation, but if they should pray or even evangelize, they are censured.[8]

Our efforts, then, in shutting up religion to the realm of the private life of citizens not only have had bad results in relativizing the ethics of public life, but have begun to do the same thing in a kind of moral sewage backflow into the private lives of our people. In the end, our experiment seems to be proving that public policy and personal moral convictions cannot be split. They can't be split because each inevitably affects the other—whether the composite religious convictions of the people influencing lawmaking, or the structure of government in turn influencing the private behavior of citizens. To cite Tacitus again, "The more corrupt the Republic, the more laws." Since an integral relationship exists between public and private, what

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arrangements best make that relationship productive of common good? We hold that the following option is best.

Church and State Distinct but Mutually Influential

Church and state have distinct spheres of responsibility but will best discharge those responsibilities with mutual respect and negotiated authority and influence. Before defending this view, we should consider whether the example of Christ and the apostles implies political non-involvement and refraining from influencing public policy.

The politics of Jesus' day. Let's look at the broader context. Being under foreign power, Jews in Palestine believed they were still in exile even though they were in their own land. In Ezra 9:8-9 (RSV), we read: "for we are bondmen." The theme is present in Nehemiah 9:36 as well: "Here we are, slaves to this day—slaves in the land you gave to our ancestors to enjoy its fruit and its good gifts" (NRSV).[9] The Jews of Jesus' day took one of three paths:

1. *Withdrawal:* what the Dead Sea Scrolls/Qumran community did in separating itself in a remote desert community waiting for God to act
2. *Compromise:* what Herod and the Herodians did to get along with their political bosses in Rome, hoping that God would somehow validate their approach
3. *Revolt:* what the zealots did in fighting against Rome, the evil empire[10]

Jesus enters the scene with a unique mission from his heavenly Father. He came to establish the in-breaking kingdom of God. Jesus came with a mission—to overthrow Satan, who was the real enemy, not Rome (Mt 12:26; Jn 12:31; 1 Jn 3:8). Another part of his mission was to restore his temple, God's new covenant people (Mal 3:1; 1 Cor 3:16; Eph 2:21; Rev 3:12), through his atoning work on the cross. Jesus was God's specifically appointed agent to reverse the curse of exile and to restore God's exiles—both Jews and Gentiles—into a new community he was establishing. The one true God had chosen Israel as a means of bringing the salvation of the world (Gen 12:1-3), and now Jesus as the true, faithful Israelite comes "in these last days" to fulfill the Abrahamic promise. He comes to restore "all

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Israel" (Rom 9:6; 11:26)—which includes engrafted Gentiles—for the fulfillment of this mission (Rom 11:16-24).[11]

What's more, Jesus' own claim to be "Lord," "Son of God," and "Savior"—titles used by Caesar—had political implications: if Jesus is Lord, then Caesar isn't. So Jesus' authority is far from apolitical, and the early Christians' allegiance to Jesus as Lord would eventually bring the wrath of Rome against them. God's reign ("kingdom") has broken into history in the person and ministry of Jesus, who heals, proclaims good news to the poor, eats with sinners, casts out demons. The kingdom is like a mustard seed that grows slowly, quietly, but powerfully (Mk 4:26-29). Jesus' call to repent and believe in the Messiah meant more than giving up private sins. He also challenged all false, anti-kingdom agendas like such as Israel's nationalistic revolution represented by the temple establishment that had become a hotbed of nationalistic fervor (Mk 11:17; cf. Jer 7:3-15) rather than a house of prayer and a city set on the hill for all the Gentiles to see. The Israelite zealots and the temple system had prevented Israel from being a light to the nations (Is 49:6).[12] Jesus' mission and message were emphatic: God's kingdom isn't nationalistic and Gentile-excluding, but invites all peoples to become part of the new temple—the new people of God.

Jesus repudiated the three alternatives of his day. But what of his seeming apolitical activity—eating with the marginalized, defying certain social taboos, healing the sick, casting out demons? These actions still had a far-reaching impact on society in the Roman Empire and throughout church history. Furthermore, Jesus had a unique mission, and so did the apostles who had a special commission. This brings up an important point: just because Jesus and the apostles did *not* do something (e.g., get involved in politics) is in itself not a reason for Christ's followers not to do it. Whether we are to follow their example in this depends on the reasons for their abstinence. If those reasons apply today, we also should refrain from involvement. If they do not apply, we are free to implement the truths of Scripture in our contemporary situation as best as we can.

Key biblical considerations. In light of this, we should embrace several important biblical considerations.

First, becoming reconciled with God and seeking first his kingdom takes

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priority over all human relationships or this-worldly considerations. Although Jesus emphasized the importance of love for one's parents (Mk 7:9-13), he challenged the common understanding of "family values," placing a greater priority on brothers and sisters in Christ than on biological family (Mt 12:46-50)—on seeking God's kingdom above all other priorities (Mt 6:33).[13] And while reconciling one human to another or restoring peace are significant and reflect the power of the gospel, such involvements do not have the ultimacy that reconciling sinners *to God* does, along with becoming Christlike in character (Gal 4:19). In the words of John Stott: "Is anything so destructive of human dignity as alienation from God through ignorance or rejection of the gospel? And how can we seriously maintain that political and economic liberation is just as important as eternal salvation?"[14]

Second, biblical virtues and universal Christian duties are more fundamental than concrete, situation-specific considerations. Unlike much Old Testament legislation, biblical virtues or duties apply in every culture, age and society. If specific action had been taught for this or that situation, it might not apply in others. For example, the principles of justice and love are major themes of Scripture; they apply in any generation in any society. Richard Longenecker makes the point that the principles taught in the New Testament were subversive to prevailing unjust social arrangements and ultimately brought them down.

> When first-century Christians spoke of being "sons of God," "baptized into Christ," and having "put on Christ" (Gal 3:26-27), they also spoke of their faith in terms of a new relationship socially in which there is "neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female" (3:28)—three pairings which cover in embryonic fashion all the essential relationships of humanity.[15]

Third, redeemed humans offer hope that society can be changed, and they should not place wholehearted trust in whoever has political power. Christ's disciples are called to be salt and light in society. Though this does not guarantee that the structures of society will change for the better, such transformation of individuals and families becomes a possibility.

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Fourth, Christ and Paul had specific vocations. Christ was sent to provide redemption and not, at his first coming, to work out all the social implications of that redemption. Satan tempted him to address the political issue first, but this would have subverted the mission. In the same way, Paul had the specific commission to evangelize the Gentiles, not to reform the Roman Empire. Christ did not evangelize throughout the Roman Empire, which would have diverted him from fulfilling God's redemptive plan. And Paul's unique commission did not include evangelizing China—nor ruling the Roman Empire. Those tasks would be assigned other people in other times. But merely because these other roles were not theirs does not mean they are illegitimate for others.

Fifth, the condition of state and church differed from today. Of course, there was no "church-state separation" in the Roman Empire, nor was there opportunity to directly impact the Roman government through voting, protests or marches. And even if the specific roles of Jesus and Paul were not for political action, it is conceivable that others in the early church might have participated in public life except for the fact that believers formed a very small minority in a strong dictatorship. Successful political action had already proved impossible through the various Jewish sects in Jesus' time—alternatives Jesus deliberately rejected.

The apostle Paul did appeal to his Roman citizenship on several occasions—for example, when he was wrongfully imprisoned in Philippi (Acts 16:35-38) and when his life was under threat from the Jewish mobs and he was in Roman custody (Acts 22:25-29; 23:14-35). Doing so helped ensure that the gospel could be proclaimed freely, that Paul's right to due process before the law was upheld, that his life could be protected from harm and death, and that he could exert political leverage to correct injustices done to him. *Should Christians today not take seriously the benefits and protections of citizenship that Paul did?* Indeed, our situation in free nations is radically different today, though there is some overlap. In a democracy the citizens are responsible for the affairs of state; to neglect this public responsibility would be equivalent, in a lesser way, to the neglect of justice and mercy on the part of a Christian king or government official.[16]

For these reasons, and perhaps others, most evangelicals have not ac-

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cepted the New Testament example of Jesus and the apostles as the mandated model for all Christians to follow, but have concluded that both the Christian citizen and the church officially should actively exercise a moral influence on public life.

Let us sketch out the broad parameters of a mutually influential relationship between state and church. The state is responsible to protect all its citizens, by force if necessary, to punish evildoers and to promote the common good (preserving peace and order). The church also is responsible to promote the common good, not through a "state church" or by forming a political party, but by commitment to evangelism, Christian virtue, biblical teaching, benevolence and being good citizens. The church has a primary responsibility for the behavior of its own members and only through its powers of persuasion for the behavior of others.

Therefore the state (1) should not use its power to restrict the church from fulfilling its mission and (2) should listen carefully to the voice of the church when it speaks to moral issues. The church for its part (1) should not demand special privileges that encroach on the rights of others and (2) should carefully refrain from compromising in order to secure benefits from the state, or from idolizing the state by treating the prevailing culture as some robust form of "civil religion."

Indifference, imposition and persuasion. Christians have had a powerful influence in bringing about much good in Western civilization. However, Christians can overreach by attempting to create laws that the broader public does not agree to and is unwilling to abide by—for example, the Prohibition (1919).

Christian theologian Miroslav Volf writes: "When it comes to the public role of religion, the main fear is that of imposition—one faith imposing aspects of its own way of life on others."[17] He rightly warns against two extremes—*totalitarianism* (or *imposition*) and *idleness* (or *indifference*). An extreme example of totalitarianism can be seen not only in Muslim sharia law, but also in a certain "progressivism" or "liberal fascism" that got its start under Woodrow Wilson and continued under Italian fascism and German nationalism (Nazism).[18] Some might argue that the "Moral Majority" effort in the 1970s was an attempt to "legislate morality" and thus

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was a move toward totalitarianism. But perhaps a more accurate picture would be one of trying to *preserve* certain ideals—traditional marriage and the life of the unborn—in the face of politically liberal forces engineering changes in social trends. A picture of indifference would be the Amish, who have detached themselves from society and live in their own insular communities, even though they are less insulated now than previously.

A wiser course is to engage in principled persuasion to win over hearts and minds rather than merely changing laws. Yes, Christians should seek to effect change to protect fundamental values articulated in or implied by Scripture, and we should give public reasons for doing so. In our pluralistic age, we should not appeal directly to Scripture (special revelation), which is not accepted as authoritative. Rather, we should attempt to persuade by making a public case in which we appeal to statistics and studies that support a biblical perspective (general revelation). For example, we can give scientific or sociological evidence concerning the harm that comes to women through abortion or that comes to couples and marriages through cohabitation. What if harm comes to the poor when government legislates high taxes for the wealthy who could otherwise have employed those in need of a job? The attempt to persuade our fellow citizens about such things implies that God's revelation is a matter of public knowledge, not a private opinion.

Some prominent politicians such as John F. Kennedy and former New York governor Mario Cuomo—both Roman Catholics—gave the impression that personal faith and public life must be absolutely compartmentalized. Kennedy, for example, claimed that he was running as a Democrat, not as a Roman Catholic. He was a Democrat who happened to be Catholic, and he insisted that the church did not speak for him. Likewise, Cuomo insisted that though he disagreed with abortion personally, he would not seek to curtail it publicly. This is an unfortunate departure from the rich Christian (and more specifically Catholic) tradition that has actually shaped our culture's thinking about human rights, democracy and a host of other human goods we take for granted. Kennedy and Cuomo made the mistake that special revelation or theology cannot give us genuine knowledge.[19] This is the very argument the secularist makes for

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removing all vestiges of faith from the public square. But why should the Christian accept that caricature? Why think that secularism ought to be accepted as the default position? Why not rather offer a persuasive case for one's beliefs, even if one does not directly appeal to Scripture? Why not use the resources of general revelation—reason, human experience, empirical evidence, conscience and the like—which are publicly available for scrutiny and discussion?

Os Guinness presents three alternatives regarding engagement in our society—we can either be tribespeople, idiots or citizens. *Tribespeople* are intolerant of anything outside of their "tribe" or beyond the concerns of their own special-interest group. *Idiots* are totally private and indifferent to public philosophy and civil engagement. *Citizens* recognize their membership in the "commonwealth" and appreciate the knowledge and skills that underlie the public life of a civilized community, which is based on the common grace given to all men by God.[20] We should avoid the extremes of tribalism and indifference; we must engage as citizens for the public good.

Totalitarianism, civil religion and religious freedom. We can speak of other extremes. One is state totalitarianism, as with Nazism, Soviet communism and Italian fascism; as we noted, the totalitarian temptation (in the name of "progressivism") took hold under Woodrow Wilson, who opposed the Constitution and individual rights.[21] Allegiance to the state becomes the new absolute—with no room for conscience or commitment to the truth. It usurps the place of God.

Allegiance to a nation or race can be so strong that it becomes idolatrous, as was the case with Nazi Germany. Perhaps we can distinguish between *patriotism* and *nationalism.* The former refers to a proper love of and loyalty to one's country; perhaps we could compare this to a special love and loyalty to one's own family. It is fitting to cheer for our country in Olympic competition, and we take appropriate, grateful "pride" in our national history or cultural richness. *Nationalism,* however, idolizes a country as intrinsically superior to other nations; it can also take the form of refusing to allow criticism of its policies (and punishing those who do criticize) or of expunging any mention of evils and negatives in its history.

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The other dangerous, idolatrous extreme is "civil religion"—when the church and state are too closely wed together. For example, does having the American flag and the Christian flag in many of our sanctuaries suggest too close a connection between the two? While we should be grateful for the existence of our nation and for a police force and military to protect its citizens, perhaps some of our Sunday "hymns" around July 4th or Memorial Day can create confusion between loyalty to Christ and nation. Although the hymn "Eternal Father, Strong to Save" prays for protection of "our brethren" in "peril on the sea," on national holidays this becomes a "navy hymn," and "our brethren" become the US Navy! We should pray for our nation, as 1 Timothy 2 urges, and we should give thanks for those who have made sacrifices for our freedoms. We are simply calling for discrimination here so that we do not "wrap the Bible in the flag."

As with the call to "return to Christian America," there is another ambiguity concerning the term "civil religion." Sociologist Robert Bellah listed at least five categories or definitions of civil religion, and not all are idolatrous: (1) folk religion, (2) the transcendent universal religion of the nation, (3) religious nationalism, (4) the democratic faith and (5) Protestant civic piety. Bellah cautions against the idea that the central conception of American civil religion is not a form of national self-worship.[22] While we can reject, say, religious nationalism, we can endorse "civil religion" if by this we mean a public policy—a political outlook or philosophy—that has been shaped largely by the Jewish-Christian worldview with its emphasis on fundamental human and civil rights, due process, equality before the law, the protection of citizens, the punishing of evildoers and the authorities' accountability before the law—without excluding those of different faiths from civil discourse in the public square.

Between the twin idolatries of totalitarianism and civil religion is the proper place of religious liberty—or the freedom of conscience. We see this theme borne out in the Scriptures. When under fire from the civil authorities, the apostles did not appeal to "the right of conscience," as modern political theorists do. They said they had good reason to believe their message was *true,* and they could not stop speaking about what they themselves had *witnessed* (Acts 5:27-32).[23]

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Christians throughout the ages have faced the conflicts with the legal authorities that have tried to silence preaching, punish for converting to Christ or for having faith at all. In our day, Catholic Charities in Boston and Washington, D.C., were forced to shut down their adoption services because they would have had to go against their conscience in making adoption available to gay couples. This was a violation of conscience that ultimately undermines the public good and the positive role that the Christian faith can have in society. Another assault on good will between church and state took place in 2012, when New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg banned churches from meeting in the city's public schools. Not only was this unnecessary, as many churches (and other religious groups) had cordial relationships with the schools renting their facilities, but the mayor also undermined the very positive spiritual and moral influence local churches were having on the city's communities.

The sacred, naked or civil public square. Another nuance to the discussion could be framed in terms of the *sacred, naked* or *civil* public square. On the one hand, we should avoid the extreme of a *sacred* public square that privileges one religious perspective—such as, say, Protestantism over against Roman Catholicism and Judaism. On the other hand, we should not adopt a *naked* public square that expunges all religion from public life and favors the minority secularist viewpoint over the better represented religionist worldview. Rather, we advocate a *civil* public square in which citizens of any faith—or no faith—can engage in public life within the framework of the Constitution.

In such a civil public square, all citizens can abide by the three R's of religious liberty to advance the well-being of all in society. The first is *rights*—a fundamental, inalienable right for people of all faiths or none to hold, exercise or change their beliefs independent of government control. This involves the free exchange and analysis of ideas and the freedom to persuade others about them. The second is *responsibility*—the duty to respect the same rights for others; within this sphere of universal rights and mutual responsibilities we can negotiate our deepest differences of belief. The third is *respect*—the freedom to engage in discourse, debate and persuasion with political civility despite differences. Religious commitment

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must not threaten others and must respectfully put up with views regarded as wrong (true tolerance) since religious consensus will not be achievable.[24]

In July 1974, three thousand evangelical church leaders from around the world signed the Lausanne Covenant, taking a position that has enduring relevance for the church's role in society:

> We affirm that God is both the Creator and the Judge of all men. We therefore should share his concern for justice and reconciliation throughout human society and for the liberation of men from every kind of oppression. Because mankind is made in the image of God, every person, regardless of race, religion, color, culture, class, sex, or age, has an intrinsic dignity because of which he should be respected and served, not exploited. Here too we express penitence both for our neglect and for having sometimes regarded evangelism and social concern as mutually exclusive. Although reconciliation with man is not reconciliation with God, nor is social action evangelism, nor is political liberation salvation, nevertheless we affirm that evangelism and sociopolitical involvement are both part of our Christian duty. For both are necessary expressions of our doctrines of God and man, our love for our neighbor and our obedience to Jesus Christ.[25]

As we see it, the best arrangement is a benevolent cooperation between church and state in which the state is frankly open to religiously inspired moral influences and the church does not seek special privileges, confining its prophetic pronouncements to *moral* issues rather than focusing on politicians or political parties.

Further Reading

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31

The Roles of Church and Government

The Role of the Church

All would agree that the church as the church must clearly proclaim the principles of justice and mercy. Furthermore, most would agree that it is imperative for the church either directly or through its representatives to organize medical care, social care, financial care, involvement in education, correction of poverty and all other "works of mercy." Thus the church influences society. But what of political action?

The primary role of evangelism and making disciples. The church's primary responsibility involves proclaiming the good news of the gospel and making disciples (Mt 28:18-19). By God's grace, the church should seek out people in the kingdom of darkness to bring them into the kingdom of light. If the church loses this focus, as many mainline denominations have done, it loses its way and basic purpose for its existence.

As we have seen, social or political activities have their place, but they are secondary to these more fundamental concerns. In making disciples, the church also has a responsibility to shape leaders who are *committed, courageous, Spirit-filled and informed. These believers should, as Karl Barth emphasized, have the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other; that is, they should be biblically informed as well as knowledgeable about pressing issues to be addressed in their community and beyond.*

In the light of these many serious and abiding ambiguities, we conclude that the church should concentrate on its primary mission modeled by Jesus and the apostles and clearly taught in the New Testament. But, as we

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have earlier argued, the church does have an obligation to its community as "salt" and "light." How should it discharge that responsibility?

Prophetic ministry to society. God's people have a calling to live Christlike lives before a watching world and to adorn the gospel (Jn 13:35; Tit 2:10). This dedication to Christlikeness includes having a prophetic voice in society through word and deed—which requires courage and character. An example would be the 1934 Barmen Declaration drafted by Karl Barth in the face of the German church's capitulation to Nazism under the sway of Adolf Hitler. Acknowledging that the state was subject to God's authority, the signatories affirmed: "We reject the false doctrine, as though the State, over and beyond its special commission, should and could become the single and totalitarian order of human life, thus fulfilling the Church's vocation as well." Likewise, the church was not to be "an organ of the State."

Address specific issues. When should the church speak? How should it speak? The church should not simply speak in generalities but specifically. John the Baptist did not address Herod with the general principle that "adultery is wrong." He said, "It is not lawful for *you* to have *her*" (Mt 14:4). In our day, topics of abortion, gay marriage, sex trafficking or helping the poor can easily be ignored in our pulpits. Too often churches are cowed into silence by their non-profit status, which means not being politically partisan. However, pastors and Christian leaders can and must speak courageously, even while not directly endorsing candidates or political parties.

Address means as well as ends. The church should speak out on the matter of ultimate *goals,* whether abolishing slavery or protecting innocent life. But it should also speak to *means,* such as the political implementation—not freeing slaves by shooting slaveholders or stopping abortion by killing abortionists. The church must be more careful about the pragmatics of the means, where it has less competence. Perhaps Christians may, in the name of "Christian integrity," insist that their Congressional representative introduce sweeping changes to existing laws on, say, abortion. However, politics often requires compromise—though not of principles or integrity—to make incremental gains. For example, a politician may not be able to persuade other legislators to making wholesale changes to abortion laws, but he may be able to introduce laws to rescue as many unborn lives.

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Perhaps one can work to outlaw late-term abortions, even if not all abortions are outlawed.

When the church errs. What if the church says the wrong thing? It has certainly done so in theology, but we do not solve the problem by saying the church should not interpret the Bible. The church often errs in evangelistic practices, but we do not cease engaging in evangelism. Admittedly, we run risks about speaking on clearly moral issues though we may be misguided about how or whether to promote this politically.

For maximum effectiveness, the church should limit its social action agenda to causes that are clearly biblical mandates. For example, bearing arms is a constitutional right, and it does, in fact, deter crime.[1] That said, conservative Christians should not assume that this has the weight of, say, the right to life or the sanctity of marriage. On the other hand, yes, helping the poor is an important emphasis in Scripture. However, Christians on the political left must be careful about assuming that true Christianity necessarily supports more spending on welfare programs—especially given the clear track record of government mismanagement, corruption and breeding dependency. Christians on both sides should give strong weight to central moral concerns for the well-being of society. Far better to limit our agenda so that we establish battle lines on clear biblical mandates.

Official voice of the church. May the church make official pronouncements, or is this prophetic ministry limited to the preacher speaking in private as a citizen? If a Billy Graham or a Rick Warren speaks on a social issue such as gay marriage or abortion, it will have more of an impact as "the voice of the church" than almost any major church council resolution. When any Christian leader speaks, that is the voice of the church to the people who accept that Christian as a responsible spokesperson of the Christian faith. Clergy in the pulpit, laypeople on the street, church bodies in council, or parents with their children—they are "the voice of the church" to those who look to them for spiritual guidance.

The Christian *citizen* should provide the primary fighting force for justice and mercy, and the *church,* through its leaders, should avoid partisan politics and work hard at creating truly Christian citizens and speaking prophetically to clearly biblical moral issues.

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Legislating morality. Can morality be legislated? First, recall that the *legal* is not identical to the *moral* (the problematic view of "legal positivism"). For example, adultery is legal, but certainly not moral. However, much legislation springs from moral concerns. And contrary to the cultural relativist, it *ought* to be legislated; in fact, it cannot be avoided! We can be grateful for laws condemning rape, murder and theft; even the slogan "You can't legislate morality" itself is taking a moral stance. The claim asserts that it is morally wrong to legislate morality!

Those insisting that what they do in private is no one else's concern are often quite wrong: Who pays the bills for gay or drug-using AIDS patients? Does the alcoholic's "private" drinking not affect others in his own home or when he is out driving—or when he enters a tax-funded alcoholic treatment program?

However, we should be careful about *over*-legislating and creating burdensome laws. If the government is representative or democratic, it cannot but reflect the judgment of the society as to what moral standards should be required of all its citizens. If such a society legislates morals that are not acceptable to the majority, or even to a large minority of its citizens, the law becomes unenforceable. It is a bad law because it promotes lawlessness. Therefore, if Christians are interested in having morals legislated, they must not only ask what is right and what is good for society, they must also ask, what will this society accept? Of course, they may fight for a losing cause on principle. But if they actually intend to impose a minority standard on the majority, they should understand that the legal fabric will be weakened and in the end much more than the specific moral issue will be lost.

The Role of the Individual Christian

We have looked at the church's role in society. What of individual Christians?

Order of priorities in social responsibilities. Following the example of Christ, Christians should order their priorities with primary concern for the reconciliation of people with God and the eternal dimensions of life while at the same time maintaining a deep concern and involvement in relationships among people and their physical and material needs.

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Responsibility for self. As a foundation for social good, individual Christians are responsible to provide for themselves (1 Thess 4:11-12; 2 Thess 3:10).

Responsibility for family. Furthermore, they have a primary responsibility for their own family (1 Tim 5:8; see entire chapter). Scripture clearly outlines the responsibility of parents in training their children (Deut 4:9-10; 11:18-19; Prov 13:24; 22:15; 23:13-14; Eph 6:1-4). Here is the foundation for a society under the reign of God.

Responsibility for fellow Christians. The believer's next responsibility is for fellow believers. "As we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Gal 6:10 RSV). Much of 1 John emphasizes the loving responsibility Christians have for their fellow believers' material welfare.

Responsibility for neighbors. Finally, having been justified (declared righteous) by God (Rom 5:1; 8:33-34), the believer will seek to do justice to her neighbor (Mic 6:8). This goes beyond giving a person her due (e.g., desert or punishment), to having regard for her as God's image bearer. The latter includes actively loving individual neighbors. How many proclaim their "love for humanity" yet fail to love the particular humans in their day-to-day dealings! The justified believer will be pursuing reconciliation in relationships, bringing God's shalom where she can, and rectifying unjust social structures that prevent her neighbor from flourishing. The believer will recognize that because she has freely received from God (Mt 10:8), she freely gives of her resources to help others.[2]

Responsibility toward society. The Christian's responsibilities for his society are especially clear in a democratic system, in which the Christian citizen is part of the governing body—the people. We have already seen that the believer is responsible to honor those in authority and to pray for them (Rom 13; 1 Tim 2:2); to obey the civil laws and authority (Rom 13:1-10); to pay taxes (Rom 13:6); to practice justice and mercy, dealing justly with employees and working to relieve the poor, the minorities (aliens), the oppressed, and the weak and vulnerable such as widows and orphans (see Mt 25:31-46, which strongly emphasizes judgment according to how people have cared for followers of Christ—25:40: "these brothers of

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Mine"; cf. 12:46-50—but also has application for neighbors in need of our care [Lk 10:30-37]).

There are other guidelines that seem consonant with the principles of Scripture, though they cannot be held to be the clearly revealed will of God. First, in order to fulfill our responsibility in seeking justice and mercy, the Christian should study the Scriptures to determine God's view on any specific issue that arises. The Word of God must be our controlling authority. Furthermore, the Christian must study the needs of the community—drugs, crime, slums, poverty, migrants, pornography, racism, family life, unemployment, housing, disease, unfair tax policy, discrimination, political corruption. What are the specific facts? What should we do about these problems? When do we begin, and how? Since I cannot personally bear all the burdens of the world, to what specific areas of need would God be pleased for me to give my attention?

Voting is another important Christian duty in a democracy; not to engage in this process is to abdicate one's responsibility for seeking a just and merciful society when he deliberately fails to vote. Single votes make a difference. Another means of influence is voicing what one believes in personal conversation, letters, articles, sermons and letters to the editor as opportunity affords. In addition, the believer may work on behalf of candidates in whom he has confidence, or to influence legislation through correspondence, petitions and in every way possible. At times, it may be appropriate to engage in nonviolent dissent, such as in sit-ins and marches. Finally, some Christians may pursue a calling in politics or other professional service to correct physical and temporal ills. Those engaged in medicine, social work or politics may be sent of God just as surely as those called to carpentry or to the pastorate. It is certainly appropriate for a Christian to run for office.

Of course, taking legal action on behalf of a just cause is one of the most potent instruments for social change in a society whose public and private values are increasingly being set by judicial order rather than legislative or executive action. However, the courts should interpret the existing law, not induce social change from the bench. If new laws need to be created due to lack of judicial precedent, this can be done through the legislative

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process or through a voter referendum, not through the judiciary, which is not a lawmaking power. Socially activist courts ultimately usurp the authority of the legislative branch and destabilize the balance of powers among the three branches of government.

Although it is not appropriate for government officials to transfer biblical standards wholesale into the execution of their responsibilities in a pluralistic society, the Christian executive, legislator, judge or other government official can certainly gain insight from Scripture on the thinking of the chief Lawgiver and Judge.

What about single-issue voting? Though some object to single-issue voting (e.g., abortion), this may be a hypocritical objection. First, what if a political candidate is a member of the Ku Klux Klan, but on all nonracial issues his ideas seem to make sense to his constituency? Wouldn't we consider a racist disqualified from office based on that single issue alone? Abortion is even more heinous than racism, yet some Christians seem to gloss over the weighty abortion issue in elections or social involvement, claiming that they are not "single-issue voters." Would they do the same about a racist candidate? Second, single-issue politics in the past has focused on landmark issues such as abolition or civil rights. Surely, some issues are more worthy of focus than others. Third, while it may be unwise to vote for a candidate because of the single issue in light of other positions she holds, many issues tend to cluster around various core concerns so that the electorate is usually satisfied with the "package." We are not advocating single-issue voting, but we are pointing out problems to consider.

Finally, let us say something about the shaping of culture. Christian sociologist James Davison Hunter warns against a certain "Christian idealism"—that slowly but surely we can start with changing individuals, then families and communities, then make moral and political reforms: "Change the values of the common person for the better and a good society will follow in turn."[3] Now, all of these have a place, and Christians are right to engage in bringing about changes one step at a time. However, Hunter warns against a certain idealistic *individualism*—that an individual such as William Wilberforce can single-handedly change society. As we saw above, Wilberforce worked in concert with many persons of influence to bring

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about widespread societal changes. Hunter also warns against a *dualism* that compartmentalizes secular and sacred, public and private, "ignoring the institutional nature of culture and disregarding the way culture is embedded in structures of power."[4]

Culture is complex, involving both *ideas* (many of which are unconsciously assumed) and an *infrastructure* (networks of individuals/institutions that include news organizations, film, the academy, etc.). And typically elites shape and influence ideas from the top down. If we fail to take this into account, our broader societal impact will be diminished. To gain traction, redefining ideas must be embraced by a good representation of these culture-shaping elites inhabiting these arenas of influence and working in concert. (Think of the institutional reforms that came through Constantine's ascent to power—even though the Christian faith had permeated the Roman Empire.) These elites give shape to new institutions whose ideas filter down to the broader society.

Hunter insists that "every strategy and tactic for changing the world that is based on this working theory of culture and cultural change will fail—not most of these strategies, but all."[5] Since the 1960s, no contemporary Christian movements have successfully created, contributed to, or supported "structures in the arts, human letters, the academy, and the like."[6] These movements have been insular, being directed primarily at "the faithful." One exception has been the movement in Christian philosophy that began in the 1960s and has led to the formation of groups such as the Society of Christian Philosophers and the Evangelical Philosophical Society, with their respective philosophical journals as well as annual and regional conferences. These movements have gained respect in the academy, and their efforts are having a broader cultural impact.

This is what Princeton Seminary's president J. Gresham Machen articulated back in 1913. He pointed out that *false ideas* are the greatest hindrance to the reception of the gospel; so we must, with God's help, prepare the cultural soil so that the gospel will be rightly understood and received—as true and life-changing rather than as a fairy tale and crutch for anti-intellectuals—a "harmless delusion."[7] This is true for evangelism, but also for social change. That is, Christians must create a certain "plausibility

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structure" for new gospel-inspired values to be embraced. Christians should strive to show that the gospel can be embraced for *intellectual* reasons as well as for "reasons of the heart" (the *existential*); that is, Christ addresses the deepest needs of the mind and the human spirit—hope, significance, security, immortality, purpose. Pastors and church leaders should affirm the proper place of the life of the mind, the imagination and the shaping of culture to God's glory. The church should support gifted thinkers, artists and writers in its midst, urging them to work with excellence to be winsome witnesses and influential role models in their disciplines and professions.

While Christians should distinguish themselves morally from the rest of culture, they should be engaged with the world—a "holy worldliness" (cf. 1 Cor 5:9-11). James Hunter says that Christians should avoid the common "Christian Right" attitude (a "defensive against culture" position), the "Christian Left" attitude ("relevance to culture"), and the "Neo-Anabaptist" position ("purity from culture"). Instead, our witness should be incarnational, using the model of "faithful presence within culture." Christians must leave the security of their "holy huddle" on the margins of society, where they lack cultural clout. They should practice *faithful presence* within culture and seek to be a Christ-centered influence within culture-shaping institutions insofar as they are able so as to make a broader impact for Christ—both as witnesses to the gospel and culture shapers who help bring God's *shalom*—faithfully ordered living—for a flourishing human society.

Christians in nondemocratic societies. Although we are primarily writing for a Christian audience that is Western—and more specifically, American—we want to raise the question: What about Christians in *nondemocratic societies* with few or no freedoms? Here are a few brief responses. First, a number of our comments will apply in many other settings—the Christian duty to be exemplary citizens and lead quiet and peaceable lives, to evangelize, to pursue reconciliation in personal relationships, to pray for political leaders and so on. Those biblical principles are universal, but the way they apply may differ, depending on the level of freedom in particular societies. As American authors within a particular political system, we do not here attempt to draw those lines for believers in other cultures. The

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body of Christ in each political setting must prayerfully find its own way, while remaining faithful to biblical teaching.

Second, unlike the West ("global North"), we can be encouraged by the fact that the church's growth has been explosive in the global South. The noted scholar Philip Jenkins has documented one of the most remarkable, yet unreported, trends today. In 1900, there were 10 million Christians in Africa; in 2000, there were 360 million—and an anticipated 633 million by 2025. And if present trends continue, Latin America will have 640 million and Asia 460 million by then. By 2050, there will be as many Pentecostals as there are Muslims today. What's more, these believers are drawn to the historic Christian faith and have a high view of Scripture; they are theologically and morally conservative. These "Southern Christians" are attempting to re-evangelize the West and are appointing their own leaders rather than following theologically liberal Western bishops. Christianity's center of gravity is shifting. And an Internet search will reveal how the conversion of hundreds of thousands of Muslim-background believers is often accompanied by visions of Jesus or other supernatural manifestations.[8]

Third, this work of God brings with it a "redemptive lift" that begins to affect families and communities. Like a mustard seed or a batch of yeast, the slow-but-sure movement of God's expanding kingdom is penetrating hearts and permeating communities. Dorothea, the heroine in George Eliot's *Middlemarch,* exemplifies this kind of incalculable, diffusive influence. Eliot concludes: "The growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts . . . and is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs."[9]

Fourth, despite limited religious freedoms and no political options, many of these believers in the global South are seeing God at work; our brothers and sisters committed to prayer are engaged in casting out demons and regularly see miraculous healings taking place.[10] We can rejoice at what God is doing in the world, and Christians North and South can pray and work together in hopes that the gospel will profoundly penetrate societies all around the world and that this, in turn, will lead to renewed social and political structures to better promote human flourishing.

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The Role of Government

We have looked at the responsibility of the church and of the individual Christian in society. What then is the divinely given task of government?

The strongest evidence for human government being an institution ordained of God is found in the *New* Testament rather than in the Old. To be sure, Israel was established as a human government, and the prophets certainly hold all human governments accountable to God's law, but it takes some strong imagination to make Genesis 9:1-6, for example, evidence of God's establishing human government in the abstract or in some particular form, as some have attempted. But human government as a divine ordinance is clearly affirmed in Scripture: "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God" (Rom 13:1 RSV). But just as marriage's being made in heaven does not bestow divine approval on *every marriage* (e.g., between a Christian and an unbeliever), so human government is God's idea even though God does not approve of *every ruler or politician* (see Hos 8:4).

Purposes of government. The government is not to be self-serving but to serve the "good" of the people (Rom 13:4). In some countries, the head of state is aptly called the "prime minister." According to Scripture, how is the government to serve its people?

Maintaining order. Civil order is always better than anarchy, and the government has an obligation to keep order so that citizens may "lead a tranquil and quiet life" (1 Tim 2:2).

Protecting citizens, executing justice, restraining evil. In keeping order in fallen societies, force is often necessary. According to the most extensive passage on government (Rom 13), the purpose of human government is to restrain evil, especially in protecting the citizens. Human sin created the acute need for the use of force by civil government (1 Pet 2:14). The minister of the state bears "the sword" (Rom 13:4)—an image of (sometimes lethal) force. This represents more than a police officer's ticket book. Thus a government should work to protect innocent civilians from invading nations from without and criminals within. Police or military personnel who receive bribes and thus prevent proper enforcement of the law and pro-

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tection of its citizens are a scandal. Where police cannot be trusted, justice is undermined.

Most people have preferred human government to none, but since rulers have seldom been content with the minimum authority necessary to protect the rights of the citizenry, the state's tendency is to expand control over the lives of citizens. Although some who idealize "freedom" believe that we would be better off without any government whatsoever, in a world of sin-prone, selfish people, some government is better than anarchy. Force seems the only way to keep some people from harming others.

Protecting God-given rights. The question arises: are governments obligated to provide certain goods to which citizens are entitled? Political philosophers distinguish between *negative* (or *natural*) rights and *positive* rights. First, what is a right? A right is a warranted or justified claim on others. *Negative* rights are minimal rights of noninterference—the right not to be harmed, coerced and enslaved by another; the government has a minimal duty to protect against such interference. More controversial and problematic are *positive* rights—a claim by some on the assistance of others, a claim to "promote another's welfare." Is universal healthcare or a university education a right? Do people have a right to employment and housing or government meals? Is the government obligated to provide breakfast and lunch or after-school services for children? Do illegal immigrants have a right to health care and driver's licenses? These alleged "rights" seem limitless and can bloat a government and rapidly deplete its resources. What about individual and family responsibility? What about fraud and the creation of dependency that is so common with expansive government?

Once the "promoting the welfare" idea is introduced, the potential for expanding government becomes immense. For this reason, some hold that the only legitimate role of government is to protect citizens from injustice, especially since this is the only role ascribed to government in the classic passages, Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2. But the only government superintended directly by God—ancient Israel—certainly established law for the promotion of the welfare of the citizens. Nevertheless, the primary purpose remains the role of guaranteeing justice, preserving order and protecting

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people from malicious harm. When government expands, either to control evil or to promote human welfare, the tendency is to eclipse human freedom—and to bloat government.

The question of freedom. The Bible has much to say about freedom, but not about *political* freedom. It speaks of freedom from sin (Rom 6:14-23), from the power of darkness (Col 1:13), from bondage to Satan (Jn 12:30-33), from the Mosaic law (Rom 7:6; Gal 2:4; 4:5, 21; 5:1) and from bondage to death (Rom 8:21-23). There is a glorious freedom in Christ (Jn 8:32, 36), for where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (2 Cor 3:17). Biblical freedom is not a general, absolute, abstract, philosophical concept. It is specifically spiritual and moral: freedom from sin and freedom to live as God intended human beings to live. No one is absolutely free. We will serve God or serve sin. Freedom should not be used as a license (Gal 5:1-2). Using "freedom" to act immorally is actually bondage.

Nevertheless, we advocate personal freedom of choice to the extent possible in a just society. Though the Bible is not strong in emphasizing it, when God himself intervenes in human affairs, it is to set the captives free from Egyptian bondage and, indeed, through the Messiah to break the bonds of all injustice and set the captives free (Is 61:1; Lk 4:18).

While the case for political freedom is not strong in explicit biblical teaching, it certainly can be strongly advocated on the basis of the principles of Scripture. For example, the Bible clearly teaches our primary responsibility to God, and a totalitarian state does wrong prohibiting worship of God and forcing the violation of conscience (Acts 5:29). Furthermore, God created humans with the capacity to make choices, and a measure of freedom is necessary to do so. Political freedom enables citizens to discharge their primary responsibility in life, which is to God, not the state. Also, when a controlling state (think George Orwell's *1984*) controls the minute details of human choices, the very image of God in humankind is demeaned. The state has no divine right of ownership, and it should not usurp the place of God by assuming unbounded, ultimate authority (Jn 19:11). Therefore, governmental authority must have limits.

Forms of government. While we must await the new heavens and earth in which righteousness dwells to live under God's infinitely wise rule (2 Pet

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3:13), we must come to terms with government in a fallen world. Apart from this, Scripture does not tell us which particular form of government is best. In terms of actual forms of government, these fall under two basic categories: (1) autocratic (e.g., monarchy, dictatorship, oligarchy) and (2) democratic (including representative forms of government by the people, such as a republic). Autocratic regimes—with power concentrated in the hands of one or few—have a far greater capacity for horrific evil. They lack the checks and balances of a democratic system under constitutional law.

Christians have lived under virtually every form of government, and, despite the fall of Communism and the impulse toward democracy in many nations, most people of the world still live under governments that severely restrict personal freedom. Therefore, most Christians on planet Earth must come to terms with this reality. How helpful that the biblical authors lived under similar circumstances! In fact, the book of Revelation was written to Christians in Asia Minor (Turkey) whose cities were prominent centers of the emperor cult and worship of Roman deities (Rev 2–3). Christians did not attend monthly social festivals held in honor of the gods, and they did not become part of the local trade guilds (like our labor unions), which required devotion to their patron deities. Although Revelation has a transhistorical message for Christians throughout the ages, the first-century Christians faced the "beast" of the Roman Empire's political and religious opposition (cf. Rev 2:10, 13). They faced social ostracism, persecution, and economic deprivation; they "could not buy or sell" unless they showed formal allegiance to the "beast" (Rev 13:17).[11]

These kinds of problems with autocratic rule do not imply that democracy is flawless. The same sinfulness may well mean democracy in the long term is destined to self-destruction. Soon after the founding of America, in the 1830s, the French social philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville wrote his incomparable analysis of American social structure, *Democracy in America,* in which he warned that our individualism might prove the doom of this experiment. In 1985, distinguished sociologist Robert Bellah published the groundbreaking *Habits of the Heart,* which concluded that democracy is doomed if something does not stop our rush toward the establishment of radical individualism. Bellah and his colleagues reviewed

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the history of America and concluded that the formative American idea is freedom. But in the beginning, with our biblical root system, that freedom was to seek *the common good,* whereas, cut off from those roots, today freedom is sought and defended to promote *individual self-interest.*

After the American Constitution was hammered out, Benjamin Franklin was asked by a citizen about what kind of government the United States now had. "A Republic, if you can keep it" was his reply. Indeed, without the leavening effect of the Jewish-Christian moral understanding that has actually given rise to democracy—due process, equal rights before the law and a commitment to the common good—the future of democracy looks bleak. If the biblical impulses toward justice, fairness and mercy can continue to influence public policy debate, perhaps the sinful selfishness of the people who vote can be held in check, at least for a time. So far, at least, democracy seems to have proved more compatible with Christian values than autocratic government.

Governmental social action in a free society. There is probably a universal consensus that government ought to protect its citizens from injustice and that it has an obligation to support those who simply cannot care for themselves. But the unanimity dissolves about whether the government should expand to guarantee the welfare of all its citizens. Individual Christians and the church should actively participate in alleviating human suffering where they can; unfortunately, the church has abdicated much of its social responsibility to the government. Families, which are the core of a cohesive and flourishing society, are increasingly fragmented. Because of this, the presumed burden falls to the government to address this crisis, yet the federal government is notoriously wasteful and inefficient.

Where possible, government assistance should be a stop-gap measure, and as we saw with the Welfare Reform Act of 1996 personal responsibility and accountability should be built into government programs. The government should strive to wean people off government subsidies rather than enlarging the number of government dependents. Compassion should not be measured by increased numbers of people on welfare rolls, but by moving people from being legitimate "receivers" (or illegitimate "takers") to being "givers." That is, they end up supporting and contributing

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to the public well-being. Showing concern for the needy does not mean the perpetuation of dependence, but rather creating structures so that once needy people can become free from government dependence to being self-standing citizens.

The government must display its own fiscal responsibility by attending to balancing its budget rather than sinking further into debt. At the time of writing, the US national debt is over $17 trillion with little being done to curtail runaway spending and to balance the budget. The *worst* way to help the poor is for a nation to continue spending money it does not have. Comedian Steve Martin's classic skit, "Don't buy stuff you cannot afford" advocates that "You shouldn't buy stuff if you don't have the money."[12] Whether one is budgeting for the family or for the country, this is commonsensical. The government should work to balance its budget annually and focus on necessary rather than frivolous or incidental ("pork barrel") expenditures. Citizens should hold the government accountable for its use of tax dollars and for avoiding generational debt for future citizens.

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Christian Engagement in Society

How does a Christian relate to authority in her dual role as citizen of heaven and of some nation-state here on earth? Some have held that she is a true citizen only of heaven and that she should separate herself as much as possible from involvement in the earthly state. On the other hand, most church traditions have held that the better she practices her heavenly citizenship, the better citizen she will be on earth. Both those who believe in isolation and those who believe in involvement teach that the normal response of the Christian toward civil authority is obedience.

Submission and Mandated Disobedience

Paul and Peter exhort believers to submit to governing authorities, which are under God (Rom 13:1-5; 1 Pet 2:13-14). But is it ever right to resist civil authority? Not only *may* a Christian resist; he *must* resist when any authority demands disobedience to God. "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29; see also Acts 4:17-20). Daniel and his friends did right in disobeying the king's idolatrous orders (Dan 2; 6). The Hebrew midwives were commended for disobeying an evil law (Ex 1). Christ told his disciples to proclaim the good news to every person (Lk 24:47; cf. Mt 28:18-19), and they obeyed him. The argument during the Nuremberg Trials that Nazi officers were "just following orders" incorrectly assumes that the *legal* is the *moral;* by extension, this means that no citizen can ever do wrong so long as he is following orders. This argument ignores the existence of a cosmic or transcendent law to which all of us are accountable, regardless of what society we happen to be in.

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What about laws that give freedom to evangelize but do not allow the distribution of gospel literature on public conveyances, as in Japan. What about smuggling Bibles into communist China? Must the Christian missionary insist on this particular form of evangelism? Does God mandate it? Our conclusion is that good activity, when not mandated by Scripture, may sometimes be justifiable but is not required. Personal guidance may be claimed, but such guidance does not have clear biblical authority and should be resorted to with caution. Prudence must be used since the activity may not be necessary for obedience to God and may jeopardize other more important values, such as freedom to witness in other ways. Furthermore, the lawbreaker must be prepared to suffer the consequences. Paul said, "If then I am a wrongdoer, and have committed anything for which I deserve to die, I do not seek to escape death" (Acts 25:11 RSV).

Thus, when commanded to disobey the revealed will of God, the Christian *must* disobey the human command; when forbidden to do something good that is not mandated by Scripture, the Christian *may,* under some circumstances, disobey the human command.

Civil Disobedience

But what of resistance when the government does not make demands on believers concerning their religion or moral behavior, but itself does wrong? Remember that Paul spoke of submission to the authorities when the tyrant Nero ruled Rome. And Jeremiah instructed exiled Judahites living under the despot Nebuchadnezzar to "seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile" and to pray for it (Jer 29:7). It is no sin for a believer to submit to an unjust government. Certainly there is no room for those in a free society to sit in judgment on a brother or sister living submissively under totalitarian rule. At the same time, we must note that Rahab of Jericho and the Egyptian midwives, for example, were not submissive—they resisted their own governments. For this resistance they were rewarded by God and enshrined among the biblical heroes of faith. Thus we conclude that sometimes it was not wrong to resist unjust authority.

How do we put the two apparently contradictory concepts together? Ordinarily believers should be obedient subjects when not required to

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disobey God, but sometimes it may be God's will for them to resist an unjust or merciless ordinance or regime. When? Even though American colonists were indeed being treated as less than full British citizens by the British government, were the colonists justified in overthrowing British rule through revolution? Or consider liberation theology, which flows from European Marxist intellectuals but is most closely associated with Latin America and its history of suffering and the exploitation of the poor. It emphasizes the dynamic of *praxis* (practice) in helping the poor over against merely holding orthodox theological beliefs.

One evangelical proponent of civil disobedience was Francis Schaeffer, who insisted that the state has only delegated authority, which should be used to punish evildoers and protect what is good in society. When the state punishes the good and rewards evil, it becomes tyrannical and thus forfeits that authority, and civil disobedience is warranted under such conditions.[1]

The problem is not whether to disobey the government when it demands disobedience to God, but whether the Christian citizen is obligated to force the government itself to stop disobeying God. The question is not whether I must refuse to abort my unborn child, as might be required of a Christian in China, but whether I must force the government to stop subsidizing the abortion of the unborn, and even whether I must force the government to stop everyone from aborting. When do I take up arms against the government—or bombs against abortion clinics?

The apostles Paul and Peter are too clear on the central thesis that subjection to civil authority is normative Christian behavior. Civil disobedience when the citizen is required to sin? Yes. Resistance to human law that violates God's law? On occasion, yes, in the tradition of the Hebrew midwives. But *required* of the believer as normative behavior? Hardly.

Violent overthrow of an established government is not biblically permissible, though we are not unsympathetic to the likes of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Claus von Stauffenberg, who were involved in plots to assassinate Hitler for his moral abominations. Nonviolent resistance is more in keeping with submitting to those in authority—even evil ones—rather than revolution and violent overthrow. We should note, however, that Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. succeeded only be-

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cause the governments they appealed to were fairly humanitarian and better informed by biblical values. They would serve as misleading models for those under unscrupulous totalitarian regimes such as Soviet Communism, in which the likes of Gandhi, King and their followers would have simply "disappeared."

But the question remains, "When all nonviolent means have been exhausted in an attempt to seek redress of wrongs, is using military force to overthrow an evil regime a channel open to believers?" If war itself is ever justifiable, when two governments exist and are in conflict, Christians may choose the side they believe is most just. But in the absence of a second government, such as a revolutionary government, the private citizen, or the church, or any other group of private citizens violate Scripture in resorting to force.

The Schools

State schools and values. Though Scripture assigns the responsibility of nurturing children to parents, society as a whole may have a legitimate interest in assuring that the rising generation is adequately equipped for a useful role in the community. There is also the self-interest of a society in the literacy, skills and socialization of its citizens. If the state does not guarantee education and literacy for all children, history would seem to indicate that only the privileged few will benefit from formal education. So there is also a humanitarian element in providing free public education for all.

When a society is homogeneous—as, for example, American society of a century ago and Japanese society today—public education can easily incorporate commonly held values. But when a society becomes culturally and religiously diverse, a common education becomes increasingly fraught with problems.

Pluralism in the society would seem to demand pluralism in education, and many assume that public—and increasingly secular—education is value neutral. But values are inescapable, as even the secularist has a viewpoint about reality (metaphysics) and about how or whether we can have knowledge (epistemology). The secularist takes an ethical stance as well—say, on abortion, homosexuality, whether morality is relative, and the like.

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As we have seen earlier, the refusal to make moral judgments is inescapably moral, and no doubt this "politically correct" viewpoint will consider any moral judgments to be terribly "intolerant"! Not only this, civilized society would be undermined by an alleged value neutrality. This is precisely the problem for "neutral" multiculturalists in Europe who do not know what to do with an increasingly uncooperative Muslim population in its midst.

We are living in an increasingly pluralistic society. How should specific values be taught in public school settings? In at least two ways. First, *establish consensus values.* Because of God's "common grace" available within cultures, apart from God's "saving grace," we can find moral commonalities. As we have seen, many cultures across the ages have affirmed duties embodied in the last six commandments, thanks to God's general revelation. We can build on the common recognition that human life is sacred; that plagiarism and cheating are wrong; that truth-telling in a court of law or as the basis for friendship is vital; that a person should respect another's private property and not take what doesn't belong to her; that adultery profoundly harms relationships; that properly understood respect for parents and teachers (even if this includes disagreement) is a building block for respecting authority as citizens. One does not need to appeal to the Bible to make a case for such moral demands. While much more work needs to be done, say, on persuading people about the sanctity of marriage over against cohabitation or about the harm brought by a duty-to-self ethic, we have much to build on.

Another way is *local-option education in values.* A true pluralism could be established by allowing any person or group to provide education in values for his child from any perspective he desires by any qualified person of his choice as part of the program of public school education—so long as this does not bring harm to society. In the 1972 Supreme Court case *Wisconsin v. Yoder,* the question under consideration was whether the state could compel children (in this case, of Amish parents) to receive public education after the eighth grade. The Supreme Court sided with Jonas Yoder, observing that the Amish generally did a fine job of rearing wholesome, virtuous children and that Wisconsin failed to show it had a compelling interest in mandating public education for the Amish.[2]

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This is a different picture from some Islamic schools (and mosques) in Western Europe that are hotbeds for Islamic radicalism and advocating sharia law. Of course, sharia law typically undermines the rights of women for self-determination, advocates female genital mutilation, and opposes the free exercise of religion (e.g., to convert to another religion) and the freedom of speech.[3] Clearly, Muslim schools that would advocate both sharia law and the undermining of a nation's democracy, constitution, and the pursuit of law and order are quite different from the educational approach of the Amish.[4]

We should again mention school choice. As we noted in chapter twenty-seven, allowing a choice injects *competition* into the educational system by empowering *parents* to use taxpayer money for "vouchers" to pay for their children to attend well-performing schools—public, private, charter or home schools—rather than being confined to "boundary schools." Education should meet fundamental academic standards, and, as we have seen, it should support rather than undermine constitutional democracy, human rights and the flourishing of society. But parents should not be stuck with sending their children into schools that are unsafe, fail to educate their students, and do not maintain discipline in the classrooms.

Although there will be divergent values in a pluralistic democratic society, a common moral core also exists, and Christians seeking to influence society can build on this foundation and encourage freedom of conscience and proper tolerance where disagreement exists. Tolerance, of course, implies that some value systems are inferior to others.

Then there is the alternative of the private school.

Private Christian schools. *A constitutional right*. Though earlier Supreme Court decisions granted the right to states to mandate public school education for all children, recently it has consistently ruled in favor of parents who wish to provide alternatives. The state has the right to require standards, but not to bar privately operated equivalent education. Constitutional law expert William Bentley Ball makes the distinction clear: "There is a vast difference between saying that 'education is a function of the State' and saying that 'education belongs to the State.'" To say that the State has a legitimate interest in educating some of the people is far from

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saying that it may control the education of all of the people."[5] Although the High Court is clear on this, not all local administrators are. So vigilance is necessary to protect the rights of parents who want their children to have an education that conforms to their conscience as well as to the educational standards of the state.

Validity. Private Christian education may be legal in a pluralistic society, but is it desirable? If it is, what about Muslim communities in Western Europe, who press to have their own private schools (madrassas) to teach *their* values—which can be subversive of national constitutions and destructive to democratic values—rather than those of the state? Let's address the latter question first. As we compare these Christian schools and madrassas in Western Europe, apart from students meeting certain academic competencies required by the state, we noted above that the state may have an interest in not permitting schools that undermine the constitution and subvert the public good.

As to the first question, there are several reasons that seem almost to demand private education as the public schools move farther into secularism and embrace it as the default view. First, if education attempts to undermine God, the ultimate reality, then this will skew how we approach a whole range of disciplines crucial to understanding who we are as human beings—psychology, anthropology, behavioral sciences, philosophy, literature (authorial intent versus reader-response theory), ethics, science (origins, design), art, though less so in medicine and agriculture. Many subjects in a secularized school's curriculum will directly subvert the faith and values Christian parents are trying to instill in their children. Second, when relativism, a duty-to-self ethic and postmodernism are drummed into the minds of students, this not only flies in the face of the Christian outlook, but also undercuts responsible citizenship in a nation.

Ideally, Christian schools offer an alternative, teaching truth and spiritual values that are recognized and honored—an opportunity to reinforce the values parents desire to instill into their children at home.

But there are problems with the Christian school movement. Some of these schools may be substandard educationally. Even where they are equivalent or superior, students may be isolated from "real life," creating

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something of a "Christian bubble." Furthermore, some Christian schools have much of the same "drama," gossip, ostracism, teasing and cliques found in public schools. Students may be inoculated to the Christian faith by exposure to "institutionalized Christianity" and perhaps legalistic standards without experiencing vibrant Christian living. And perhaps parents send their children to Christian schools as a version of glorified babysitting: the parents may be professing Christians yet utterly fail to embody Christlikeness, thus creating a certain resentment in the child at parental hypocrisy. Another concern: having had a Christian education from elementary school through high school, a student may face a rude awakening in a secular university—with clashing worldviews and immoral student lifestyles.

Given the direction public education in America is going, increasing numbers of conscientious parents can be expected to join the exodus to Christian education—and many of these are opting for homeschooling.

Homeschooling. An alternative to public school education, for which an increasing number of parents are opting, is homeschooling. Whereas there were 10,000 homeschooled children in the 1970s, in 2007 there were 1.5 million. The number of homeschooled children increased from 1.7 percent in 1999 to 2.9 percent in 2007.[6]

Homeschooling has advantages. It can reinforce strong family ties, integrate education with life, and protect children from secularist evangelism and destructive peer pressure. Also, teaching one or two students is generally more effective than teaching a class of thirty because instruction can be personalized. The conventional wisdom that homeschooled children lack socialization skills does not square with the evidence. For his doctoral dissertation, Larry Shyers had trained counselors observe both homeschooled and public-schooled eight- to ten-year-old children at play: "The study found no big difference between the two groups of children in self-concept and assertiveness, which was measured by their social development tests. But the videotapes showed that youngsters who were taught at home by their parents had consistently fewer behavioral problems."[7]

A 1997 study of 5,402 homeschooled students revealed that they out-

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perform their public school counterparts by 30–37 percentile points in all subjects—an average of 59th percentile for public school students compared to those homeschooled the last two or more years scoring between the 86th and 92nd percentile.[8]

Homeschooling is not for everyone, and parents must take public, private and homeschooling alternatives on a case-by-case basis. Christian parents may have strong opinions about each of these avenues as being *the* "Christian" or "ideal" approach, but this is unwise. For example, in more conservative communities the need for separate education is less pressing, and some public "magnet" or "charter" schools may be both academically challenging and wholesome, furnishing an opportunity for Christian students to mix with non-Christian peers and be salt and light to them. And, of course, consistent parental involvement in their children's education is the best guarantee that they will succeed academically.

When considering homeschooling, parents should consider educational quality, the needs of the individual child, and their own fitness to teach and willingness to commit the time and effort necessary. Every child is "home schooled" in that the home is the first, the foundational and God-ordained context for learning the most significant lessons of life. God has given parents the primary responsibility for educating their children, regardless of which alternative structure of education is chosen. Though institution-based education relieves parents of much "hands-on" instruction, parents should be involved continually in the supervision, integration and evaluation of their children's education.

But we can confidently affirm that two God-ordained institutions—the Christian home and the church—are the primary antidote to problems generated by flawed educational systems, whether public or private. Though not absolute, the influences of these two institutions bear out the proverb, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Prov 22:6 RSV).

The Media

Newspapers, magazines and movies all participate in value formation, but the strongest of all influences is television. Although Nielsen ratings re-

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cently indicated that TV watching is technically on the decline, this is small comfort, as movies, videos and various forms of electronic entertainment are on the rise.[9] The average American will have watched the equivalent of *nine years* of television in his lifetime—compared to the mere months the average Christian spends in Sunday school and church services over a lifetime. The disparity of influence—let alone time investment—is enormous.

Falsehoods from Hollywood. Television critic Michael Medved has highlighted three lies coming out of Hollywood.[10]

"It's only entertainment—it doesn't influence anybody." No one really believes this. Just think of the billions spent on television advertising to influence viewers. How much more the movies and TV series watched by our culture! He adds that evidence from more than sixty major university studies indicates that "prolonged exposure to violent images on television does lead to more hostile, violent and aggressive attitudes and behaviour in real life."

"We just reflect reality. Don't blame us; blame society." How many murders does the average person see in real life? The vast majority of us have not witnessed one. But how many murders does a person see on television? Out of an average of 350 characters on primetime TV each night, seven of them are murdered—a far cry from reality. What about sexual promiscuity? Medved notes a 1994 University of Chicago study indicating greater sexual satisfaction for married persons than single people. But according to Hollywood, promiscuous sex is more exciting; in fact, it's the only kind of sex that is portrayed. These depictions are a far cry from normal life. The same is true of the portrayal of religion, the most serious of matters. Priests are immoral; preachers are money-grubbing charlatans; church buildings are filled with mindless fanatics. Of course, movie producers will bash Jesus—as in Martin Scorsese's *Last Temptation*—but they wouldn't dream of trashing Muhammad or Islam. "Freedom of expression" in the media has its limits!

"We give the public what it wants. If people don't like it, they can always turn it off." The fact is that many moviemakers have a culture-changing agenda. For the most part, they see themselves as change agents and deliberately

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attempt to foster a value-neutral if not an antireligious, antitraditional-value perspective. Medved writes,

> for 20 years, movies rated G and PG—for family audiences—have done better on average than R-rated movies by a ratio of more than two to one. And yet the number of R-rated films has risen to over 60 percent of movies. Why? Because Hollywood hands out prestige and recognition based on the absurd notion that artistry is not the ability to inspire but the ability to shock.[11]

And it's no solution to say, "Just don't watch those films." The problem is that once a profane movie is out, it will become the topic of conversation at school, at work, on TV. Hearing about them becomes like the air we breathe.

Furthermore, while sex and violence contribute to the coarsening of our culture, the attack on traditional values is far more thorough and widespread than these two paramount concerns. James Hitchcock, a history professor at St. Louis University, observes:

> Here [in the mass media] the reigning pieties of twenty years ago—religion, capitalism, patriotism, the family—find themselves subject to relentless attack. "News" coverage emphasizes obsessively the problems associated with all these traditional institutions. They are habitually represented as dying, and as dying because they are rigid, sclerotic, and atavistic, their only hope for survival based upon their ability to change beyond all recognition. In those areas of the media which purport to be merely entertainment the powerful weapon of ridicule is constantly directed at traditional values and those who espouse them. Such people are routinely depicted as insecure, stupid, neurotic, and ridiculous. In television fiction, for example, religion is often shown as a deforming influence, rarely as a positive and supportive element in people's lives. Religious believers are either hypocrites or fanatics.

Entertainment, nihilism and a brave new world. A danger of our media world—whether news, music, movies or all manner of technology—is that we will "amuse ourselves to death," as Neil Postman put it.[12] We run the risk of living in Aldous Huxley's "brave new world" rather than George Orwell's *1984* world, in which "Big Brother" would watch our every move. Huxley's futuristic picture anticipated that people would come to love their self-created oppression through being enamored of their technol-

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ogies, which undo their capacity to think. They are willing to surrender their freedom so long as the government takes care of them from womb to tomb. Postman says that while Orwell feared those who banned books, Huxley feared that there would be no reason to ban a book *because no one would want to read one.* Rather than becoming a *captive* culture (as in *1984*), Huxley feared we would become a *trivial* culture. It is not what we *hate* that will ruin us, but what we *love.* We cannot endure what does not entertain. News programs that cause us to think or shows without constantly changing images prompt us to reach for the remote control.[13]

Besides the pursuit of amusement, another noteworthy, and troubling, trend in television and movies is the increased emphasis on an aimless, absurd and destructive nihilism, which is reflected in famous serial killings and school shootings such as Paducah, Kentucky; Columbine, Colorado; and Newtown, Connecticut. Nihilism, according to atheist philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, is the moral state in which "the highest values devalue themselves, human aspiration shrinks, and the great questions and elevating quests of previous ages no longer have any resonance in the human soul."[14] Nihilism undercuts both tragedy and comedy, and in many TV shows and movies we witness a detached ironic humor that portrays genuine suffering as funny; misery is inflicted as a source of amusement. Martin Scorsese's *Cape Fear* is a remake of an earlier version of the film—but Scorsese seems to delight in terror as an end in itself, almost glorifying it. And his film makes frequent allusions to Nietzsche's philosophy.

In this growing number of nihilistic films, the pursuit of happiness is an *endless and ultimately unsatisfying quest,* producing a profound melancholy and restlessness. Pessimism gives rise to new expressions of nihilism, including creative sexual exploitation and violence, in the name of what Nietzsche calls "the will to power." This illustrates "the law of diminishing returns"—previous "thrills" eventually become tiresome and must be surpassed by further twists of evil.

This reflects what the late French intellectual Jacques Barzun wrote: "In the West the culture of the last 500 years is ending."[15] He refers to an emergent *decadence.* It is not so much moral decay and corruption, but a "falling off" of Western civilization. After four revolutions nearly a

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hundred years apart (religious, monarchical, liberal and social), a cultural sense of purpose is disappearing. Because there are no clear lines of cultural advance, we appear to have exhausted all of our seeming possibilities. Art forms seem passé; boredom, fatigue and restlessness set in as historical forces.[16]

Not surprisingly, nihilism has nowhere to go since God has been removed from culture's center stage. In premodernism (prior to the 1600s), God's existence made sense of the world. With modernism, the individual human knower displaced God as the starting point for knowledge, but this led to the shattering of human optimism in the modernist dead ends of Auschwitz and the Soviet labor camps. Now in our postmodern world (beginning in the 1960s), humans themselves have been decentered, and there is nowhere to turn. Soviet labor camp survivor and dissident Alexander Solzhenitsyn rightly noted in his Templeton Address that "men have forgotten God."

This mood—indeed, crisis—presents an opportunity for the church to use media to direct our culture toward the good, the true and the beautiful, which are anchored in the triune God. Returning to God and to his ultimate reality in individual and cultural life can rejuvenate, revitalize, and restore the imagination and a profound sense of divine purpose. Epic films such as *The Lord of the Rings* do just that. They take seriously human choices and the dread reality of sin; they portray the human struggle and the beauty of virtue; they aptly depict the battle of good against evil; and they offer hope and redemption, reflecting an outlook on life anchored in a transcendent reality. This is the vision that filled the minds of great Christian thinkers in the past. The philosopher Blaise Pascal spoke of the God-shaped vacuum in each of us, and St. Augustine confessed, "You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their peace in you."[17]

Christians and the media. We have already addressed ways in which Christians can make a difference in society, but here are some further thoughts. First, we must be immersed in Scripture, renewed and sharpened in our minds so that we can attend to cultural trends with critical vigilance (Col 3:16; Rom 12:2).

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Second, we should deepen and broaden our souls through reading rich, horizon-expanding literature. The West is increasingly shifting from a reading or *word*-oriented culture to a visual or *image*-oriented one. Not only should we drink deeply from the Scriptures, but continuously and intentionally read from great literature that nourishes and deepens the soul; as we read, reflect on, delight in and converse about the insights and themes from these books, we will find ourselves becoming *more human.* Think of the dramatic impact that Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had in helping to humanize a nation in highlighting the plight of black slaves in the antebellum South. This kind of reading will help make us better *thinkers,* make us *wiser* about life in this world, and enable us to become more *compassionate* as we learn to put ourselves in the place of others and better understand their plight.[18]

Third, Christians should set the trend for thoughtful, high-quality, theologically rich, Christ-centered programing in Christian radio and television.

Fourth, at a systemic level, the media will change only as media people change. Christians of talent should gain training and experience to engage and influence the secular media or to create films that will speak powerful, redemptive, God-honoring messages. Movies can speak to our human condition in the context of creation, fall and redemption. When done well, they can deepen us as humans and make the good, true and beautiful attractive—as has been exemplified in films from *It's a Wonderful Life* and *Ben Hur* to *Chariots of Fire, Bella, Lord of the Rings* and *Amazing Grace.* The same could be applied to music and other arts.

A fifth area of influence is *pressure.* We see no biblical principle barring people from bringing economic pressure on companies and advertisers to promote decency and to contribute to the public well-being. Whether a Christian should be conscience bound to personally boycott every product that has sponsored any undesirable program is another matter. In the complex economic system in which we live one would have to leave this world, it would seem, to be totally "clean," certain that not a cent of one's expenditures would ever benefit any evil person or cause. But when an advertiser, media company or particular program becomes blatantly anti-

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biblical in the values it propagates, a personal boycott may be demanded as the only worthy response.

We have briefly surveyed the major institutions of society, seeking to determine at what points Scripture gives light on how a Christian and the church itself should relate to government, education and the media. The issues are complex and the light is often only dim and oblique, but still we have the promise of the Spirit to guide us through the Word. So let us not despair, but press forward to more perfectly understand the world in which our lives are set and the Word God has given to illumine our pathway through it.

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PART XI

FALLIBLE CHOICES

Though God's Word is our ultimate, trustworthy guide for life, our own understanding and practical application of that standard are subject to error. In this final chapter we turn to two crucial areas about fallible choices. First, what do we do when we believe there is no ethical issue at stake but other Christians believe there is? Second, does God have a preference about the choices in our lives that are apparently neutral—vocation, marriage partner, employment? How do we decide without special revelation to make such matters clear?

We have sought to explore the Scriptures with integrity about issues in which God has given clear revelation. We have discussed biblical ethics using the framework of the Ten Commandments. And we have also noted that a developed Christlike character—self-control, contentment, humility, love—is God's overarching concern for us (2 Cor 3:18; Eph 5:1-2; cf. Gal 4:19). A well-developed character makes obedience to God's will more automatic or second nature, and we will be wiser in making judgments when faced with decisions not clear in God's Word.

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Ethical Questions on Which Christians Differ

Wouldn't life be simpler and life in the believing community more tranquil if Christians were completely agreed on belief and action? Why the division on certain ethical questions? There are several reasons.

Reasons for Differences Among Christians

Authority of Scripture. Mark Twain said, "It's *not* the parts of the Bible I *don't* understand that bother me; it's the parts I *do* understand." Twain was a skeptic and hardly sympathetic to biblical authority. One would think things would be different for professing Christians. However, they may be at odds with one another regarding moral issues such as abortion or gay marriage because of the same diminished view of biblical authority. Witness the cultural capitulation of various mainline denominations, bowing to the spirit of the age. One outspoken mainline Protestant pastor—yes, pastor!—wrote on his blog,

> I think the Bible is wrong about most everything. . . . I think the Bible is wrong about cosmology, history, our future, Jesus, and God. The texts were all written by human beings without any supernatural or special revelation. . . . Don't misunderstand. I enjoy the Bible. It is a marvelous human book. I read it and study it with all the critical means at my disposal. In so doing, I will do my part to undermine its Authority which I think is the next important step for religious freedom.[1]

While the disagreement may exist between Christians about Scripture's

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demands, the problem here is not Scripture's *clarity* but its very *authority.*

Another cause for disagreement about Scripture's demands may be the *challenge of discipleship and the difficulty of obedience.* Some may hold that, due to the frailty of the human condition or the impossibility of living up to God's ideals, God's commands may be violated. In this case, some "interpret" the plain teaching of Scripture to invalidate the command for application to life today—for example, entering into marriage with an unbeliever or diminishing the uniqueness of Christ and the Great Commission (Mt 28:18-20) because of the pressures brought on by a religiously pluralistic culture. In this approach, the interpreter has become the authority and standard of evaluation as to which commands apply and which do not. This will generate conflict with those who accept the plain teaching of Scripture as the final authority.

Ignorance. Some people differ on ethical questions because they do not know what the Bible teaches. This is common among new Christians who simply have not read Scripture—or lifelong professing Christians who are biblically illiterate because they have not diligently studied the Scriptures (Acts 17:11; Col 3:16). This can also be true of those who, through tradition or a particular theological or ecclesiastical system, have been influenced to see Scripture in a particular, flawed way—for example, as justifying antebellum slavery, slave trade and the inferiority of blacks.

Disputed meanings. Even among those who understand Scripture and are godly and fully committed to obedience and pleasing God, there are often differences as to what Scripture actually teaches on a given issue. This is the focus of our attention here. Christians who disagree about just war, pacifism and the use of force not only diverge on their interpretation of "turning the other cheek" (Mt 5:39), but they *both* consider this an inherently moral matter. On the other hand, we are dealing with questions that are not inherently moral but are treated as such by certain believers.

These amoral matters are sometimes called *adiaphora* (matters of indifference). Perhaps this could include mode of baptism (sprinkling vs. immersion) or, as in Paul's day, eating idol meat sold in the marketplace. With the former, some would insist on one mode over another as a matter of moral conviction. With the latter, some believers did not feel freedom of

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conscience about eating meat once offered to idols. Clearly, such disputes will not be resolved unless the person with scruples comes to recognize that this is not an inherently moral issue.

Paul's use of "strong" and "weak" has confused some. Yes, the "weaker brother" is one who has scruples, but he may be very strong in his *convictions.* Nor is he necessarily *spiritually* weaker. He is weak in *conscience* as he does not recognize his liberty in Christ in morally neutral matters—that "in the Lord Jesus . . . nothing is unclean in itself" (Rom 14:14).

Paul's discourses in Romans 14 and in 1 Corinthians 8, 10 serve as a vital guide about matters of conscience. The strong person is one who is strong in "faith" or free in conscience—that is, she is strong in the confidence that God does not condemn her in, say, eating meat offered to idols. The "weaker" one lacks faith or confidence that the disputed practice is actually morally neutral. Most earnest Christians will be "strong" in some areas but perhaps "weak" in others; they consider certain disputed practices wrong and others innocent—even within the same fellowship.

Paul's chief point is that we must accept those with whom we differ, without demeaning or looking down on those whom we may consider unbiblically narrow, on the one hand, or belittling those whom we may consider unbiblically compromising, on the other. The free-of-conscience tend to view the conscience-bound as theologically or even intellectually ignorant, while the conscience-bound tend to view the free-of-conscience as spiritually or morally compromised. Paul condemns both attitudes, telling both sides, "accept one another just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God" (Rom 15:7). But practically speaking, how does one decide the issue itself? Does a standoff of this kind indicate that each person is free to choose the course of action which pleases him most?

Response to Differing Opinions

Attitude. The goal for Christians is not to please themselves but to please their master, Jesus Christ (2 Cor 10:14). Rather than settling for what is least harmful, they reach for what is highest and best. Rather than seeking to avoid punishment, they seek to bring joy to their heavenly Father—a positive eagerness to please him. And when they faithfully study God's

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Word, their goal is less to *master Scripture* than to *be mastered by it* (Is 66:2).

If this is their orientation, they will not choose between two interpreters on the basis of personal preference. True wisdom from above will discern the twin truths that not all learned people are godly, and not all godly people are learned. Christian confusion in ethical matters may very well stem from following erudite theologians who are not submissive to God's Word, and many noted for personal godliness may not be careful, astute interpreters of Scripture. God's Spirit will not do the homework of interpreting Scripture for us, and each Christian must assume responsibility to pursue both a thorough understanding of the Bible (2 Tim 2:15) and the cultivation of Christlikeness (Gal 4:19). The more reliable guide on ethical matters on which believers differ is the one who has been diligent in attending to both areas.

Study. Assuming we have adopted an attitude of humility before God's Word, we will faithfully study God's Word. We will take seriously not only principles of effective interpretation, but also how the great cloud of Christian interpreters—past and present—has understood the relevant biblical texts. Church historian Jaroslav Pelikan noted that *traditionalism* is the dead faith of the living whereas *tradition* is the living faith of the dead. And while tradition and biblical commentators in church history are not infallible, we would be foolish to ignore our rich theological heritage. Knowing the church's traditions and interpretations can both invigorate our faith and help shed light on our path.

Rather than assuming ourselves to be self-sufficient interpreters of Scripture, the way of wisdom recognizes that our reading of Scripture requires community—Christian interpreters both past and present. The latter includes reading the Scriptures *crossculturally:* we may easily gloss over or be blinded to certain moral truths related to materialism, racism or sexual purity. By reading in community we can proceed with greater clarity as to whether biblical texts refer to morally neutral matters or morally significant ones. The wise believer should increasingly be able to distinguish between mere cultural values and biblical ones and between what is legal and what is moral.

Living wisely. James 3 refers to "wisdom from above," and as we search

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the Scriptures, we will discern Christlike character qualities and dispositions to cultivate relevant insights concerning disputed matters and disagreement about matters of conscience. Here is a sampling of questions derived from many sources to make decisions as we seek to walk in the way of wisdom.

- *Is it for the Lord? Does it bring praise to him?* "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor 10:31 RSV; cf. Rom 14:6-8).
- *Can I do it in his name—on his authority, with his approval? Can I thank him for it?* "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col 3:17 RSV).
- *Can I take Jesus with me? Would Jesus do it? Can Jesus look over my shoulder and approve?* "Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?" (Ps 139:7); "your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Col 3:3; cf. Mt 28:19-20; Jn 14:16-17, 23; Gal 2:20; 1 Pet 2:21).
- *Does it belong in the home of the Holy Spirit?* "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body" (1 Cor 6:19-20; cf. Eph 4:30).
- *Is it of faith, springing from a clear conscience before God? Do I have misgivings?* "But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin" (Rom 14:23); "Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God" (1 Jn 3:21).
- *Does it positively benefit, build up (not simply, "Is it harmless?")?* "Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification" (Rom 14:19 NIV; cf. Rom 15:2; 1 Cor 10:8; 1 Cor 14:26; Eph 4:12-16).
- *Does it spring from, or lead to, love of this world and its value system?* "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world,

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the love of the Father is not in him" (1 Jn 2:15; cf. Mk 9:47; 11:14-15).

- *Does it involve a morally or spiritually compromising partnership with an unbeliever?* "Do not be bound together with unbelievers, for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?" (2 Cor 6:14).
- *Does it have the potential to entice or enslave?* "Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?" (Rom 6:16). "'All things are lawful for me,' but not all things are helpful" (1 Cor 6:12 RSV; cf. 1 Cor 10:23; Tit 3:3).
- *Is the motive pride or love?* "We know that 'all of us possess knowledge.' But knowledge puffs up while love builds up. Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know" (1 Cor 8:1-2 NIV).
- *Is a godly mindset the context of my decision on the matter?* "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Phil 4:8 ESV; cf. Rom 12:1-2).
- *What does the church or godly guides say about it?* "Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men" (Rom 14:18 ESV). "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements" (Acts 15:28 NIV; cf. Rom 14:16).
- *Would I shrink from doing this at the return of Jesus?* "Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming. . . . We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 Jn 2:28; 3:2-3; cf. Mt 24:44-51; Lk 23:34-35; 1 Thess 5:2-4).

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This is not a list to memorize, but a few examples of biblical guidelines to help decide disputed issues. Many have found it a useful checklist to consult.

Christians convinced that Scripture's clear teaching is violated must challenge the position of those who do not see a question of right or wrong involved. But what does the believer do when she is convinced that there is *not* an ethical issue involved? What if she has diligently searched the Scriptures and investigated the issue from every feasible angle and considers herself free in conscience on the matter, yet a fellow believer is convinced she is doing wrong? What is her obligation to the "weaker brother"?

The free person's response to the "bound." Scripture teaches that Christians have several obligations to those who have scruples about a matter.

Receiving and building up the other. Christians must *receive brothers and sisters* who differ from them (Rom 14:1; 15:7), recognizing them as those of equal standing before the Lord. Any tendency to put them down as ignorant, any show of friendliness in order to set them straight, violates this biblical principle.

They must choose that which would *build up their brothers and sisters* and not what would hurt or destroy them (Rom 14:13, 15-16, 19, 21; 1 Cor 8:1, 9-13; 10:23). For example, some Christians may believe that drinking alcoholic beverages is legitimate, but their drinking could lead other Christians to go against their own conscience and thus sin. If they do this, they have become a stumbling block to these others—a hazard to their growth and success as Christians. So they must refrain from drinking in their presence.

For example, in 1 Corinthians 8, Paul describes a stronger brother attending a morally neutral, nonreligious social event in Corinth—even though it happens to be at a pagan temple. This was a festive event with good food. Though the believer has a moral right to be there, Paul urges the stronger brother to show concern for the weaker brother's spiritual well-being and forgo this activity to protect him from falling back into paganism: "For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating [literally, reclining] in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols?" (1 Cor 8:10 ESV).[2] Freedom for me is not license to do what I please but strength to sacrifice my rights for the welfare of others.

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Not causing stumbling. Should the stronger refrain from engaging in certain morally neutral acts *only if* it would lead someone into sin—to violate his conscience—or does this extend to "offending" or upsetting a believer, even if he is nowhere near being led into sin? Clearly, "cause to stumble" here means "influence or cause to sin" in violation of conscience—something a "free" person should resolve never to do. What about simply being "offended" at the stronger's actions? The Pharisees were "offended" when Christ set aside their tradition (Mt 15:12). They were unhappy and angry but were far from following his example. Paul may have "offended" or upset Peter by challenging him about distorting the gospel by excluding Gentile believers from table fellowship (Gal 2).

What if some believers might become upset by a *neutral* action by the stronger? Should the stronger stir up strife and anger by asserting their rights ("liberty") and "tweaking" fellow believers to distress them or perhaps shake up what may be a touch of legalism? I (Paul) recall a preaching class in seminary in which we were to dress up in—what else?—our "Sunday best" when it was our turn to preach to the rest of the class. We were all shocked when one seminarian showed up to preach in a sweat suit and tennis shoes, proclaiming that he wanted to preach a message that was without hypocrisy—a not-so-subtle jab at the rest of us who had followed the professor's instructions. While he preached, I could not concentrate on his message because I was so thoroughly distracted by the "sincerity" of his dress.

What if a visiting pastor wears a suit and tie on Sunday that would be appreciated by an elderly congregation and does not inhibit the proclamation of the gospel or reaching people for Christ or fostering spiritual growth? Going casual and thus ruffling feathers would hardly seem necessary, nor would it be loving to "challenge the status quo" on this matter. The goal of building up others will serve as a caution against unnecessarily "offending" as well (Mt 7:12; 22:39; Rom 14:15, 18; 15:2; 1 Cor 10:24, 28-33).

On the other hand, in some settings, a pastor wearing a robe or even suit and tie might create barriers in becoming all things to all people to save some. Or when a church's insistence on a certain music style only addresses the concerns of its senior citizens but discourages the next gener-

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ation from attending and even drives its young people away, it is time to review the church's approach to ministry. Perhaps work out an arrangement that seeks to address both concerns—with sacrifices made on the part of both generations? What of blended worship with both biblically rich, engagingly sung hymns as well as contemporary songs with biblical substance? We recognize, though, that not all official "hymns" are necessarily theologically sound or musically appealing. On the other hand, some contemporary "worship" looks more like performers at a rock concert rather than true worship leaders who involve the *entire* congregation as a corporate priesthood in "ministering to the Lord" (Acts 13:2).

Taking the greater burden. Are limits laid only on the "free" person, but not the "bound" person? No, the law of love applies to both. The "bound" person must also act in love, not needlessly laying her scruples on others or making demands that bind them to her convictions—unless she believes the matter to be so serious that she must forbid others as well as herself. The "free" person, however, cannot demand this kind of loving response from the "bound" person. His only option is to continue lovingly and joyfully yielding until the other lovingly chooses to release him.

The reason is easily understood. For the person who has convictions on a matter, to compromise would be to violate her conscience, and that, according to Scripture, is sin. The person who does not have convictions on the matter is free to yield his freedom without violating his conscience. For weaker, *right* is at stake; for the stronger, only *rights.* Thus, the motto for the truly free person is, "Let *his* conscience be *my* guide."

Considering the cause of the gospel. No Christian should feel bound by the conscience of *every other Christian.* If that were so, Paul could not have been "all things to all people" in order to save some (1 Cor 9:22 ESV). Indeed, Paul's approach reminds us that the preferences of the weaker *should be overruled when the gospel and the unbeliever's reconciliation with God are at stake.*

This point is clearly illustrated in Paul's confrontation of Peter in Antioch (Gal 2:11-21). The Lord had instructed Peter about not calling Gentiles "unclean"—like the soon-to-be believer Cornelius. Through Christ, Gentiles were to be incorporated into the people of God and so Peter

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should not call "unholy" what God has "cleansed" (Acts 10:10-16). Yet Peter failed to display this acceptance of believing Gentiles in Antioch when a Jewish contingent from James in Jerusalem came into town. To point out that God had freely accepted Gentiles as well as Jews in Christ, Paul had to publicly rebuke Peter about his hypocrisy, which had led astray even Paul's own mentor, Barnabas. When the scruples or even preferences of the weaker prohibit accepting other brothers or sisters in Christ or distort the gospel message, Paul's condemnation could not be more severe (Gal 1–2).

In this confrontation of consciences, Paul sought to keep the main thing the main thing. We must go and do likewise. Many well-meaning Christians may erect barriers to the gospel—that one must, say, believe in young-earth creationism or embrace a certain version of Calvinism to be a "true Christian." But these endeavors must be stiffly resisted so as not to present obstacles to the gospel ("you must accept Jesus *and* young earth creationism"). That is, one can be a true believer and not hold to a young earth or to Calvinism. The believer can embrace these views without requiring that others hold them in order to be faithful believers.

Considering the other's proximity. This voluntary binding of one's own conduct by the conscience of another only applies when the person who might be offended *is close enough to be offended.* There is no obligation for us, who live in the southeastern United States and are not even Amish, to dispose of all our neckties and remove all our buttons because some Amish brothers in Pennsylvania think such are "worldly." So, if the person with a "bound" conscience is distant geographically or organizationally, he has no legitimate reason to be personally offended, and the "free" person, who sees no ethical issue involved, should not consider himself bound.

This principle of loving concern is, in the nature of the case, limited to those with a close relationship. Examples of a responsible relationship would be, in descending order, members of the same family, the same church, the same institution, friends and near neighbors.

In specific relationships, it may be the responsibility of the person who is strong in faith and knows that there is no ethical issue involved to instruct the person who is bound by the scruple. Paul did this when he sought to inform the conscience of the weak, instructing them that the earth is the

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Lord's and all it contains (1 Cor 8:1-3; 10:25-26; cf. Ps 24:1); so the believer is fully free before the Lord to eat meat offered to idols. And this instruction can be by word or action, depending on the importance of the issue and the level of one's responsibility. If the "free" person does not have a responsibility for the spiritual development of the person, she should simply respond in love, giving up her rights for the sake of the other person.

A guest speaker in a King James Version–only congregation does not necessarily have a pastoral duty to enlighten the congregation on the benefit of some translation other than the KJV. Though he may feel free to use other translations, why stir up potential strife and possibly hinder communication? But in matters of personal responsibility—the parent of a minor, the pastor of a church or the teacher in school—the person who is strong in faith must work to free those with scruples on these sorts of issues. For example, as theological educators, we have taught students about the nature and validity of various Bible translations, which ones are stronger than others, and why.

Both the "free" person and the "bound" person must consciously choose in favor of *that which makes for peace—a vital kingdom value;* we ought to be more preoccupied with peace and joy in the Spirit than we are with the likes of eating and drinking (Rom 14:16-17, 19, 20; 15:5-6; 1 Cor 3:17; Eph 4:3; Col 3:14). Peace in God's family is an extremely high value—though we should not pursue peace at the expense of truth. The key to matters of conscience lies less with the bound person than the free person, who can more readily sacrifice some of his rights in pursuit of peace, though not his conscience and commitment to truth: right, no; rights, yes. On the part of the free person, he can sacrifice some of his rights without undermining his conscience. But compromise on the part of the bound person would violate his conscience, and this he cannot do.

The response of the "bound" person. What of those who are bound in conscience on a certain matter but find that others do not consider the matter an ethical issue? Perhaps they begin to suspect that their inhibitions are not of a moral nature after all. What should they do?

Of course, the believer's first commitment is to obey God: "For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin" (Rom 14:23 RSV). Beyond this, she

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cannot behave as a free person on the issue until her conscience itself is free. This comes through studying and reflecting on Scripture and observing the lives of godly believers in other settings. Many Christians are bound by scruples that are not scriptural, and this can have a negative impact on them and those around them.

We have seen that the conscience is something of a moral alarm system that should not be ignored or suppressed (Amos 1–2). On the other hand, the conscience can also be partly misshapen or skewed by misguided parental, cultural and religious influences. Some of us are familiar with moralizing Christian subcultures and damning sermons on the wrongs of rock music, movies and playing cards—what John Stott has called "micro-ethics." But the conscience needs proper and constant reprogramming and renewal through attending to God's Word and walking by his Spirit (Rom 12:2).

And like the "free" believer, the "bound" believer must accept the person who thinks differently (Rom 15:7). He must do so without judging him as an inferior (Rom 14:4). He must likewise act in love, preserve peace and not needlessly harangue believers who think differently.

Also like the strong in conscience, the weaker party's responsibility to help a fellow Christian understand the issue will depend on their relationship. The weaker ones must, of course, act on what they believe to be right. But when it comes to others, the responsibility ranges from that of parents holding their children to biblical standards as they understand them, to the lesser responsibility of pastors teaching the truth as they see it while recognizing that other believers may fairly disagree, to no responsibility at all for those who are unrelated to them.

For *both* parties, the responsibility is twofold: first, to understand Scripture with ever greater clarity, and second, to obey God's will wholly. Learning and godliness—or learning *in pursuit of* godliness—must be the goal of both, not simply the weak in conscience.

Further Reading

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34

Knowing God's Will in Matters Not Revealed in Scripture

All Scripture is profitable for wise living and the pursuit of Christlikeness (2 Tim 3:16-17), and this guidance is available to all human beings who have access to the Bible. But beyond this revealed general will does God have an individual will for each believer? Or does he simply will that we obey him, be like him, and for the rest of it do as we please? If God has a custom-designed plan for each believer, does it extend beyond the major directions of life such as one's vocation? Does it extend also to the incidental activities of a single day?

Introducing the Issue

First of all, the emphasis of Scripture concerning the will of God deals with what is clearly revealed for all. Guidance into wise thinking and behavior is the common emphasis (Ps 25:8-15; 32:8; 73:23-26). God's will for us is to live holy lives (1 Thess 4:3). The Lord's guidance as our shepherd is to direct us into "paths of righteousness" (Ps 23:1-3). And to be transformed into Christ's image is a lifelong pursuit (Phil 3:12-14). *Being* is more important than *doing*, *character* more than *command following*, and our *vocation* as kings and priests more than our *location* (see 1 Cor 12:31–13:3).

As believers, we are called to participate in Christ's mission to the world: "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (Jn 20:21 NIV; cf. Lk 4:18-21). The mission of the church involves colaboring with God to carry out all it is called to do in the world: engaging in global and local evangelism, service,

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proclamation of God's Word, worship, bringing relief to the poor and freedom to the oppressed, and so on.

But what of the specifics—vocation, marriage, education, location, healing, finances? Does God have a specific purpose for each person? If he does, is it possible to know God's will in such matters and consciously follow it? Garry Friesen's influential book *Decision Making and the Will of God* devotes more than four hundred pages to prove the thesis that God does not have an individual will or uniquely designed life plan for each believer—there is no "individual will of God" for each believer.[1] If a decision is within God's moral will, it is acceptable to God. The believer is free when it comes to "nonmoral" decision making.

We can agree with two of Friesen's correctives to the oft-abused "traditional" view. First, Scripture is primarily concerned with moral and spiritual guidance, with becoming more like Christ and living wisely. Second, the traditional concept of guidance has been seriously abused. Yet swinging the pendulum from dogmatic subjectivism ("the Lord told me") to the opposite extreme of what appears more like autonomous rationalism is not the appropriate corrective. It is, indeed, much easier to go to a consistent extreme than to stay at the center of biblical tension.

No reputable biblical scholar would advocate the abuses of divine guidance cited in Friesen's book. And even decades before Friesen's book, A. W. Tozer said much the same thing: "Except for those things that are specifically commanded or forbidden, it is God's will that we be free to exercise our own intelligent choice. . . . In almost everything touching our common life on earth God is pleased when we are pleased. . . . God's choice for us may not be *one* but *any one* of a score of possible choices."[2]

Perhaps part of the popularity of this approach is not so much due to a dissatisfaction with abuses of "intuitionism" (a "word from the Lord") and attitudes of infallibility about "God's plan for your life," even down to its minute details. But a deeper reason may lie behind it—namely, a shift in interest from the clear demands of Scripture such as world evangelization (Mt 28:18-19) or a life of self-denial (Mt 16:24) in favor of a quest for personal autonomy and fulfillment. While Friesen emphasizes attending God's general demands in Scripture, this may have the unintended conse-

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quence of catering to our culture's individualism and the pursuit of personal fulfillment.

But is this not a heavy price to pay for freedom? Does this approach not create a sense of insecurity—as though God doesn't really care about momentous decisions in my life—about where to attend university, whom to marry or which job to choose? The psychological question, however, must give way to the *truth* of the matter. Does Scripture tell us?

The Case for Divine Guidance

We propose four lines of argument from Scripture that reinforce the traditional view that God does indeed have a plan for each of us, a preference about many of the choices we make and a commitment to bring about his special purpose in each life.

Divine guidance, according to the traditional view, is one of the Christian's deepest needs and highest privileges. What is the biblical evidence?

The general tenor of Scripture. The general tenor of both Testaments would lead even the casual observer to believe that God has an interest in the nonmoral choices of his people and that he goes to great lengths to see that his will on these details is carried out. What difference did it make where Israel encamped? And yet God gave both supernatural guidance through the pillar of cloud and fire and also the very natural wisdom of an expert human guide. How could it matter whom Isaac married, so long as it was one of the same faith? Yet God went to extraordinary lengths to guide Abraham's servant to a particular girl (Gen 24). These are not isolated instances; Scripture is replete with reports of God's guidance in nonmoral matters.

In Christ's life, certain anticipated—indeed, inevitable—events had to wait their time: we read that his "time" or "hour" had "not yet come" (e.g., Jn 2:4; 7:8, 30; 8:20). We see also that Jesus "*had* to pass through Samaria" (Jn 4:4), and he delayed a couple of days before visiting the tomb of the very dead Lazarus, but with a view to displaying God's glory in raising him to life (Jn 11:1-45). His food was to do his Father's will (Jn 4:34), and he did nothing apart from that will (Jn 5:19-20, 30; 8:28). He was constantly guided by the Spirit (e.g., Mt 4:1) and was sensitive to God's timing for

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each phase of his life as it unfolded. Was such planning only for the divine Son of God, or does he in this, as in so many other things, serve as our model, demonstrating by his responses that God put him here on purpose and that his whole life was devoted to fulfilling that purpose?

The Bible gives the unbiased observer the strong impression that the examples are chosen, not only (or even always) for their special significance in the plan of redemption, but also as windows on God's way of doing things. And when Saul cried out on the road to Damascus, "What shall I do, Lord?" (Acts 22:10), Jesus informed him of his new vocation as an apostle to the Gentiles—and not of a general list of moral laws he was violating. Nor are these specific purposes simply for some "elite" class in God's kingdom, but for all.

God's sovereign purpose. God's sovereignty and human responsibility are crucial doctrines for understanding guidance, but reconciling them has been a great source of confusion and controversy. Scripture is clear that God is in charge and knows where he is going. Even pictures of God's seeming "surprise" at human decisions or "changing his mind" reflect a certain "humanized" (anthropomorphic) language to reflect the dynamic of divine-human engagement as well as the seriousness with which God takes human choices.[3] But Paul states with crystal clarity that God "works all things after the counsel of His will" (Eph 1:11). And while Scripture nowhere speaks of human "free will," it assumes that humans are fully responsible for the choices they make and that in certain things they may act freely (e.g., Acts 5:4).

We must take care not to pit one side—divine sovereignty or human choice—over against the other. A promising attempt to bring both of these together is known as the "middle knowledge" or Molinistic view, which is named after the sixteenth-century theologian/philosopher Luis de Molina. He argues that God by his very nature knows the choices moral creatures would freely make in any possible world in which they were created. For example, God knows that the inhabitants of Keilah *would* turn David over to Saul if David were to remain there with his men (1 Sam 23:12-13); so after finding this out, David leaves before this can be done. Or God knows that the Israelites *would* lose heart at the prospects of war if they went by the

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northerly "way of the land of the Philistines" (Ex 13:16-17). In light of such innate divine knowledge, God creates the actual world, through which his sovereign purposes are accomplished without overriding human freedom.[4] But however sovereignty and freedom are related, the integrity of God's sovereign will on the one hand and human responsibility on the other must be maintained simultaneously.

As we put our trust in Christ for salvation, we identify with God's sovereign plan: God initiates salvation and seeks out human beings through the influence of his Spirit while we respond by receiving that gift. However, we can also resist the influence of God's Spirit (Acts 7:51) or perhaps grieve the Spirit or stifle what he desires to do (Eph 4:30; 1 Thess 5:19). The same applies to evangelism or financially contributing to the advancement of God's kingdom, in which we become part of the fulfillment of God's sovereign purposes for other persons (Acts 1:8; Lk 16:9; cf. 1 Cor 3:7-8). We pray because a foreknowing God is able to work through freely offered prayers to bring about what otherwise may not have taken place (Jas 4:2-3; 5:16). We pray and evangelize in faith, even though we do not know how God will finally work out his purposes. God *desires* that certain things take place—namely, the salvation of all persons (1 Tim 2:4; 2 Pet 3:9; cf. 2 Pet 2:1) or submission to God's purposes (Lk 7:30)—even if these are not finally realized.

Why should we suppose that guidance would be any different? In even seemingly small choices, we find that our actions are interwoven into the tapestry of God's overarching purposes. Think of Pharoah's daughter finding and adopting Moses—a momentous event that would lead to the exodus and the formation of Israel as a nation. Or in recent history, consider how a chauffer's innocent wrong turn onto a dead-end street in Sarajevo led to the assassination of Austrian Archduke Ferdinand, which led to the unleashing of World War I—which influenced the outbreak of the Russian Revolution—and then Germany's humiliating defeat, the punitive measures in the Treaty of Versailles, Hitler's rise to power in Germany and his leading the German nation to initiate World War II, and so it goes.

We humans have the privilege of being led in participation in God's divine plan; and even when we err, God will even then work all things

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together for his glory and our ultimate good (Rom 8:28). We can find hope and encouragement that we trust in God—not in ourselves and our own judgments about his hidden purposes—and that he will accomplish all that he intends in his overarching purposes, despite human resistance and mistaken choices. Knowing this is a critical first step to understanding God's guidance—and to understanding the nature of prayer.

The nature of prayer. Prayer is a primary means for us to receive from God his promised wisdom and power as well as the needed resources to accomplish his purposes in the world (cf. Jas 1:5; 5:16). And God's people are frequently requesting guidance from God: "teach me," "guide me" and "lead me" are frequent prayers or even assumptions in the Psalms (e.g., Ps 5:8; 25:5; 27:11; 86:11; 48:14; 73:24; cf. Ps 25:12; 48:14). God's people throughout Scripture trust in God's promises to guide and direct them, and they pray for this.

The role of the Holy Spirit. The role of the Holy Spirit includes the task of guidance. Indeed, the Lord "does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7 NIV), and he communicated his purposes through various means (Heb 1:1). In the new covenant age, God grants visions and dreams and prophecies to his people (Acts 2:17; 1 Thess 5:20). And of course, through the Spirit's leading of the disciples into all truth (Jn 14:16-26), we have guidance from the apostolic community in the pages of the New Testament.

Also through the Spirit, each believer has gifts imparted as the Spirit wills so that all may serve in building up the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:7, 31; 14:1, 39). And we participate through prayer in discovering and implementing his will—"earnestly desire the higher gifts," said Paul (1 Cor 12:31 RSV). While Scripture's emphasis on guidance is often moral, many passages also refer to nonmoral personal guidance. Psalm 139 illustrates personal guidance—that God is ever with David and "will lead" him (Ps 139:10) throughout all the "days ordained" for him. And even if the guidance is in some instances corporate rather than personal, it is in many instances not solely moral guidance (Ps 48:14). And we are familiar with the oft-cited promise that, through fully trusting and knowing God intimately, "he

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will make straight your paths" (Prov 3:5-6 RSV). What is more, God prohibits seeking guidance through mediums and spiritists (Is 8:19). And in both Testaments, the divine Shepherd cares for his sheep and leads them day by day (e.g., Ps 23; 77:20; 78:52, 72; Jn 10). In the context of practical matters related to financial challenges, James exhorts people to ask for wisdom from God with single-minded devotion—which is to be "pure in heart"—rather than with double-minded allegiance to the world and God (Jas 1:5-6; 4:8; cf. Mt 5:8).

These four lines of biblical teaching reinforce the conviction that God does have a plan for each of his children: the general tenor of Scripture as seen in the lives of biblical characters, the pervasive teaching that God has a sovereign purpose in all things, the nature of prayer and the role of the Holy Spirit.

So how do we "make wise choices" or "discover the will of God"?

Pleasing God in the Choices of Life

The directed life. How does one come to know God's will in matters not revealed in Scripture? Perhaps Proverbs 3:5-6 is the clearest passage in Scripture concerning guidance along life's footpaths with their various challenges—but only for those who "trust in the LORD"; this means that they "do not lean on [their] own understanding." Their lives are characterized by surrender to God ("trust . . . lean") and by personally drawing near to God ("acknowledge Him" has the sense of "know Him intimately"). *Trusting* God leads to a deeper *knowledge* of God. As a result, God directs our paths (cf. also Prov 16:9).

In other words, if we meet these conditions of active, intentional trust and obedience, we will indeed be doing the will of God. Our heart attitude must first be right, and subsequent guidance is *God's* responsibility! Again, we cite the late singer Keith Green: "Just keep doing your best, and pray that it's blessed, and . . . He'll take care of the rest!" If my heart is right, God will actually *direct* my life—in large areas such as marriage and vocation as well as incidental footpaths as well. And rather than having a marked roadmap for our entire lives, we move forward trustingly and "keep in step with the Spirit" (Gal 5:25 NIV).

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While the path may at times appear inscrutable, we can receive directions from God through certain resources he provides.

Receiving directions: Understanding the will of God. *Scripture.* As we look to the example and teachings of Christ, the exhortations of the apostles, the saintly sages' poems and proverbs, and the stories spanning the Scriptures, we gain insight into the biblical "way of wisdom." Through them, we come to discern the fullest available picture of God's will for us. Although Paul speaks of the Old Testament's wisdom for life, the same applies to the New Testament as well: "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17).

Prayer. The second principle is to actively seek God's will in prayer. "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously" (Jas 1:5). To ask God for his will in any choice (wisdom) does not mean that we ask him once and then let it drop. The clear teaching of Scripture is that we are to keep on asking (Mt 7:7) if we really expect to receive an answer. This is what Paul did when he sought the Lord for healing on three occasions. In this case the will of God, which was finally revealed to him, was that he should not be healed (2 Cor 12:8-9).

Prayer is not only required for obtaining wisdom as we make decisions; it is especially necessary to ask for strength to *do* God's will—and submitting to it even in the face of testing and difficulty (Mt 26:37-44). At its very root, true prayer must ultimately express the petition, "Your will be done." Prayer requires a willingness—indeed, a commitment—to do God's will (Jn 7:17), and it typically requires persistence in asking, seeking and knocking (Mt 7:7-11). Why should the believer expect further guiding light from God if he is unwilling to do God's will?

Furthermore, the believer ought to cultivate a spirit of prayer and intentionally "set the LORD continually before" him (Ps 16:8). Paul exhorts believers to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess 5:17). In his day-to-day and moment-to-moment activities, Brother Lawrence "practiced the presence of God." More recently, Frank Laubach (1884–1970), a missionary to the Philippines, cultivated an ongoing inner conversation with God. In such a

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conversation, the will of God becomes more apparent as we cultivate the discipline and joy of moment-by-moment prayer.

Thus, prayer is not only important in seeking God to make his will more clearly known to us but also to cultivate a deepened willingness to do God's will (Heb 10:7; cf. Ps 40:8). Thus prayer for guidance is focused on the following requests:

1. For *faith* that God will keep his promise and direct the affairs of my life to the full accomplishment of his purposes.
2. For strength to *obey* his will no matter what the personal cost.
3. For *wisdom* to understand scriptural teaching and the circumstances of life that impinge on the decision.

The church. Given the American solo-flying, lone-ranger mentality, an often neglected factor in discerning God's will is the word or voice of the church. In matters affecting the life of the church and even as individuals, we detect a biblical pattern of unitedly seeking the mind of the Spirit (e.g., Acts 13:2-3; 15:22-28; 16:10). The Jerusalem council in Acts 15 discussed, examined the Scriptures and prayed concerning outreach to the Gentiles in light of the Mosaic law. The course of action they chose "seemed good to the apostles and elders" and "to the Holy Spirit" (Acts 15:22, 25, 28). Throughout the Old Testament, we see special times of corporate fasting and prayer undertaken by Israel. In Proverbs, wise advisers are important in successful decision making (Prov 15:22; see also Prov 11:14; 12:15; 19:20; 20:5, 18; 24:6).

Of course, we should seek the advice of godly, wise believers on spiritual matters. But we should also take care to confer about technical or professional matters with experts in their field—whether Christians or not. It is no credit to us to seek out a medical doctor who happens to be a fine believer but is inexperienced or less-informed than her peers. Furthermore, we should seek as objective a judgment as possible, which often means conferring with a disinterested party not related to the problem or concern. Moreover, we should not seek one who is considered "soft" and who might be expected to concur with us in the easy solution we may want. Some people keep "counseling around" until they find the answer they want. A

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professing Christian woman whom I (Paul) know desperately desired emotional and sexual intimacy with someone of the same sex, and rather than listening to trusted believers who would frankly disagree with her, she sought out certain "spiritual counselors" who were sympathetic to her cause and desires.

After a person has studied the Scriptures for principles that bear on the issue, prayed earnestly and consulted the church (in matters appropriate for church consultation), and he still does not have a clear indication of the will of God, what next?

Reason. If it is a decision that cannot wait, make an intelligent choice and act with trust in God. "Direction" is promised whether "directions" have come through clearly or not. God will incorporate this in his purpose for us,[5] or he will certainly deflect us into another course of action.

If we are walking with God in obedience, saturating our minds in the will of God as revealed in Scripture, we may simply make a decision, and whatever we do will be the will of God for us. If it is not, he has assumed the responsibility to (re)direct us. Psalm 32:8-9 offers important insights:

> I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go;
> I will counsel you with My eye upon you.
> Do not be as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding,
> Whose trappings include bit and bridle to hold them in check,
> Otherwise they will not come near to you.

We see that God's instructing and teaching and guiding us *includes* our making responsible, wise and mature decisions—unlike horses and mules that require an owner to constantly direct them. As we trust in God, we can act with confidence that he is keeping his promise to direct our paths.

Not to use our minds (for example, making a "pros and cons" list in the decision-making process) is to ignore one of God's marvelous gifts. Anti-intellectualism is antispiritual. We are to love God with all of our *mind* (Mt 22:37) and be transformed by the renewal of our mind (Rom 12:2). No wonder Luke writes that "it seemed good to the apostles and elders" at the Jerusalem council (Acts 15:22)—a corporate mental judgment. Indeed, we reason about our circumstances: "If all other job opportunities are closed and I must provide for my family, I will have to take this one." We reason

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about our own spiritual gifts and natural endowments from God; we reason about our past experiences and present opportunities. What about taking personality tests, going through a spiritual gifts inventory, and seeking out other ways of evaluating how best to move forward in a job or vocation? Though these are optional, they are fully compatible with a biblical approach to making choices in the will of God.

John Wesley's "quadrilateral" looked not only to *Scripture* as the primary source of spiritual guidance, it also took seriously *tradition, experience* and *reason.* Indeed, we should seriously consider our own Christian heritage and the richness of our traditions that have stood believers in good stead. We can learn valuable lessons from church history and reading about the experiences of our godly Christian forbears. We can read their journals and their reflections about how they lived before God, the decisions they made, the challenges they faced.

Again, when we do not know clearly how to proceed and yet are pressed to make a decision, we must prayerfully do so, using our best judgment (both individually and with godly Christian counsel), and leave the results up to the Lord. In some cases we may need to take the route of the disciples as they selected a successor to Judas. They found two qualified persons (who had been with Jesus from the very beginning of his ministry and were witnesses to his resurrection), committed the matter to prayer, cast lots and left the outcome to God (Acts 1:15-26). A friend of mine (Paul's) told me the story of a young pastor, who had to decide between two congregations to shepherd. After much prayer and reflection, looking at the pros and cons, and conferring with others, he still could not decide. He called his father, a seasoned pastor, about how he should proceed. His father said, "If you have done all you can and cannot clearly discern how to decide, then like the disciples in Acts 1, entrust the results of a coin flip to God."

Parents must physically guide every step of the infant, but guidance gradually changes till the teenager comes to be led more by principles instilled and counsel requested; only in emergencies does the parent intervene. Likewise, the longer a believer has saturated his mind in the teachings of Scripture and the longer he has intimately companioned with the Guide himself, the more trustworthy becomes his spiritual judgment.

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Of course, God may give a special experience to the most mature saint as well. But ordinarily we are responsible to make the choices of life according to our best judgment. That judgment might be called, in biblical terms, wisdom.

As finite sinners, we do what we can with the limited resources we have. A person can prayerfully choose a seemingly well-suited partner, but may find hidden challenges because that spouse has been sexually abused or may become mentally unstable through the loss of a child years later. So we should speak in terms of "a good choice" or "the best option" rather than "*the* right way" or "guaranteed success."

If our decision proves to be a dead end, we need not be embarrassed or blame God. We can learn valuable lessons and become more like Christ through the frustrations and cul-de-sacs of life. Without clear indications of divine guidance, plans made in the ordinary events of life should be made in pencil! James exhorted ancient entrepreneurial disciples to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that" (Jas 4:15). We can make our plans, but the Lord sovereignly directs our steps (Prov 16:9). Despite the murkiness of the future from our own vantage point, we can move forward confidently, trusting in God who has promised to guide and preserve us, even through deep valleys, fiery trials and turbulent waters (Ps 23:4; Is 43:2).

Inner conviction. After the decision has been made in the light of scriptural teaching, prayerful contemplation, consultation with responsible spiritual leaders, and careful consideration of the circumstances, we will often find that God gives an inner confidence and peace and quiet conviction that he is pleased (Phil 4:7-9; cf. Jn 14:27; 2 Cor 6:10). Some say that this inner intuition is not part of guidance. But this reasoning seems strange to us.

Of course, biblical writers were "moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet 1:21). But the gift of prophecy—the act of reporting what God brings to mind—is a sign of the new covenant era, which extends to the second coming, when we "shall know fully" and see Christ "face to face" (Acts 2:17-18; 1 Cor 13:8-12; 11:5; 14:1; etc.). The gift of prophecy—unlike finally authoritative Old Testament prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah or New Testament

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apostles such as Paul and Peter—requires "weighing" or "sifting" and is subject to apostolic authority (1 Cor 14:37). Even though the prophet Agabus had successfully predicted a famine in Jerusalem (Acts 11:28), he seems to have added his own detail to a Spirit-inspired prophecy when he said Paul shouldn't go to Jerusalem (contra Acts 20:22-23). If he did, he would be bound by the Jews and turned over to the Gentiles (Acts 21:10-11), but it was actually the Gentiles who imprisoned Paul there (Acts 21:23-24).[6]

Also, the Spirit's work in the world includes his convicting people of sin (Jn 16:8-11) and "cutting [them] to the heart" (Acts 2:37 RSV). Though God opened a door to preach the gospel in Troas, Paul "still had no peace of mind" because Titus was not there; so he went on to Macedonia (2 Cor 2:12-13 NIV). These are common indicators of the Spirit's inner workings within ordinary human beings. These heart promptings are basic divine guidance and direction.

Such inner impulses should not be mistaken for the infallible voice of God; these may often reflect our own preferences more than they do God's will. But, consulted along with the more substantial methods of guidance, inner convictions are certainly a valid part of determining the course of action that most pleases the Lord.

While peace often accompanies obedience to divine guidance, this does not mean that we will feel good about it when it may conflict with our natural desires. Assurance often follows. But even if not, one must reconsider how twice Paul and his team did not have such assurance or their circumstances challenged their initial decision they made traveling to Asia Minor and Mysia (Acts 16:6-10). This serves as a reminder that no one is infallible at discovering God's will, and that stepping forward with God requires humility. Trusting God to guide us may require that we adjust our choices as we follow the will of God. An unsettled spirit may point us in the direction of an alternative course of action. God can engineer our circumstances so as to direct us toward the right course of action.

How can we distinguish between the intimations of the Holy Spirit and our own feelings? As Scripture does not answer this question, we assume that it is not important to do so. When the time comes to act, we should simply act in faith in the light of our understanding of the circumstances and

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leave the results to God. For many of the ordinary choices of life, we simply should go ahead and do what we are disposed to do (Acts 5:4; 1 Cor 10:27). In other words, God expects us to do what we prefer on most occasions.

Perhaps our own personal testimonial would be appropriate here. In the ordinary choices we must constantly make throughout each day, we just "do what comes next." When the decision is obviously important for the future course of our lives, of others or of God's work, we usually pause to pray or, when others are involved, invite them to pray with us. Often in a deadlocked committee meeting, when we pause to pray, things come clear. But for the most part we simply use our judgment, trying to take into account any biblical principles that might inform the issue, make a decision, and act.

In the major decisions of life or when our circumstances become baffling in their complexity, we take several days to fast and pray about these matters. The primary objective is companionship with God, and these times have never failed to prove an unforgettable experience. But they are also very practical, not merely some ineffable mystical experience. We read extensively in Scripture, prayerfully meditating on its implications for us and affirming our eagerness to obey. All the while we evaluate the circumstances of our lives, including a fresh look at strengths and weaknesses, past failures and successes, future hopes and dreams, opportunities and limitations. Robertson has written out on paper his "stream of consciousness"—his judgment concerning each aspect of his circumstances and how they fit together or fail to fit, especially with what God says in Scripture; and gradually things begin to come together, a light begins to suffuse the dimness and confusion of his thinking, and a clear judgment concerning the next step begins to emerge. We both have been able to step out with a sense of confidence that God has done it again, opening a way for us and keeping his promise to direct our steps to walk in the way that pleases him.

Dangers to Avoid

Subjectivism. Christian psychologist James Dobson tells the story of a hunch he had on the day he received his doctoral degree from UCLA as he returned home. He writes: "Then, as I turned a corner (I remember the

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precise spot), I was seized by a strong impression which conveyed this unmistakable message: 'You are going to lose someone very close to you within the next 12 months. A member of your immediate family will die, but when it happens, don't be dismayed. Just continue trusting and depending on Me.'" A year passed, which turned into ten, but still no deaths in the family.[7]

The fact that certain hunches or impressions prove false doesn't mean that God can't inspire thoughts or ideas in our minds to guide us (e.g., Neh 2:12; Ezra 7:27). One influential Christian said that when he had doubts while at university, he would get some rest and his doubts would dissipate. Indeed, we may have difficulty in distinguishing between the impulse of the Spirit and the response of our emotions that may reflect fatigue, illness, or cultural or personal preferences. A mere inner impulse is not itself a legitimate basis for decision making. As G. Allen Fleece, former president of Columbia International University, once said, "Even gamblers have hunches. When you come to me and say, 'I feel led . . .' I respond, 'So does that gambler.'"

A young man who had come to faith in Christ after leaving his wife and child came to me (Robertson) for counsel. He had stopped attending church because, according to him, the Lord gave him all the wisdom he needed through the Holy Spirit and fellowship with a friend. He took up with a non-Christian girl and, after living with her for some time, asked the Lord what his will was. He learned through "prophecy" that he was to stay with her, that they were to be life partners. The girl became pregnant but so far had not accepted his invitation to "believe in Jesus." Living in direct violation of several clear biblical directives, he "knew" God's will with no church, no Bible, not much prayer—just "revelation."

Feelings or impressions can be used by God, but it is wrong to give them ultimate authority in one's life. They are not ultimately decisive. A pilot friend told me (Robertson) that when he is in a cloud and cannot see, the worst thing is for him to trust his own instincts. He can be flying in a vertical bank and feel like he is flying level. It is absolutely essential that a pilot trust his instruments and fly by them alone although he may feel very uncomfortable about doing so. So in the dark, uncertain times of life we must rely on the instrument panel of Scripture.

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Rationalism. The opposite danger is total reliance on our own reasoning without relying on guidance through the direction of the Word and the Spirit. Rationalism is an inadequate approach because it relies on a believer's autonomous reason, just as intuitionism relies on a believer's autonomous feeling.

Magic. We use "magic" to describe the view of guidance where a person acts only when she perceives some apparent supernatural manifestation to indicate God's will. While God does often act supernaturally,[8] this should not be treated as a normative or ordinary means of guidance. It is indeed extraordinary! And we certainly have heard our share of stories about people using Scripture in this magical way; they randomly select a verse here and there, independent of the author's intention and the context, and it operates more like a sanitized Ouija board or reading tea leaves randomly arranged in the bottom of your cup.

Others in their daily reading of Scripture expect "biblical confirmation" before making a decision—that is, a verse must speak directly to the situation about which they are praying. But for one to take the verse "You have stayed long enough at this mountain" (Deut 1:6) as an indication to move from Denver, Colorado to the Midwest or Florida is mistaken. This "word from God" bears no relationship to the intent of the biblical author and its normative use—even if God may accommodate human frailty in allowing an immature believer to find his direction in this way. And why magically depend on the Bible? Why not claim God's intervention through discovering a similar parallel in some novel or newspaper report?

Some will appeal to Gideon's example of "laying out a fleece" (Judg 6:36-40) as a means of discerning God's will. The problem with this approach is that, apart from the text not furnishing any authoritative commendation, God had already given Gideon plenty of indications of what to do, confirmed by other signs. Nevertheless, God once more graciously accommodated his lack of faith.

A young couple, each from a tragic home situation, was having an exceedingly stormy courtship. Their immaturity and emotional instability boiled over in my (Robertson's) presence as they came for counsel as to whether they should be married. The man expected unequivocal obe-

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dience even then in their semi-engaged state, and the woman was still in love with another man with whom she had periodically cohabited. I counseled caution, but a week later they came with the announcement that God had revealed they should be married. "We asked God to show us in the Bible reasons why we should not be married by the end of the week, and if he didn't, we would know it was his will for us to be married." Truly, there is no limit to the ingenious tests one can put to God to achieve what one wants with apparent divine approval.

Mere "open doors" are not necessary indicators of God's guidance. What if there are several open doors? Very evident supernatural intervention may sometimes be part of God's guidance, but one should not insist on this as a normative pattern. Unusual events in themselves are insufficient to establish God's will in the matter.

Though most circumstances are inconclusive of God's will, some *are* conclusive—at least for the time being. If the girl turns you down, the company lays you off, the church doesn't issue a call, these are clear indications of whom not to marry or where not to work. Positive circumstances may indicate the will of God: a miraculous healing or deliverance from accidental death certainly indicates that God still has something in mind for you to do. But for the most part, circumstances alone, either "miraculous" or ordinary, should not *determine* a choice, though, as we have seen, they do properly figure in the choice.

Infallibility. Those thinking they can consistently achieve absolute certainty in judging their next course of action subject themselves to great frustration. If their choice proves successful, they will be reinforced in the arrogance of their own infallibility—and if wrong, they may bear the "guilt" of having failed God. Not even Paul assumed infallibility in the ordinary decisions of life. He knew well that "we see in a mirror dimly" (1 Cor 13:12). And as we saw in Acts 16, Paul attempted to go to Asia Minor and then Mysia and was thwarted, but God led him to Macedonia instead.

On the other hand, a side benefit of realizing that our judgments and decisions are not infallible is not only the release from arrogance on the one hand or guilt on the other, but also freedom to make corrective decisions. As my (Robertson's) father said, *God's will for me is always in the*

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present. Instead of being handicapped in the present by "vain regrets over past failures," a young man in a bad marital match must recognize that now that he is married, this is God's will for him and that he can, if his attitude is right, still find God's peace, whatever his problems may be.[9]

Trivialization. Another misuse of guidance is to trivialize it, which can run in two directions. Either *no* choices may be considered the single will of God in the matter (we discussed this above)—or *every* little choice in life can be exalted to a will-of-God class decision. On the latter, it does not honor the sovereign Lord to insist on discovering "God's one-and-only will" in every incidental choice of life. Someone I (Paul) knew would pray about which ice cream flavor to pick out of the thirty-one flavors at Baskin-Robbins. Some people pray about what color of clothes to wear. While this may seem "spiritual," it is not an idea derived from Scripture, which allows latitude here. The Israelites were told they could eat whatever they desired (Deut 12:15, 20-21). Peter told Ananias that he could have done what he wanted with his property while he owned it (Acts 5:4). Paul told the Corinthians, "If one of the unbelievers invites you *and you want to go,* eat anything that is set before you without asking questions for conscience' sake" (1 Cor 10:27). On this verse, Elisabeth Elliot comments: "Paul took the whole thing very casually. It could happen any day, and, like crossing the street, it might be dangerous. But Paul was writing to Christians, and he assumes that if they went, they went with God. It was nothing to pray and fast over."[10] To treat every choice as one that must have positive direction may have the appearance of magnifying God's role, but it actually trivializes it and is not in conformity with the instruction of Scripture, nor with the behavior of any biblical character.

Irresponsible deferring to others. It is possible to seek guidance in an attempt to avoid responsibility for my own choices. While some self-confident believers may presumptuously or even arrogantly rush ahead of God (Jas 4:13-14), less confident persons may be tempted to pull back from advancing God's purposes instead of "looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God" (2 Pet 3:12). Each of us will be held accountable for the way we have used kingdom opportunities (Mt 25; Lk 12:36-48; 1 Cor 3:10-15).

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Privatization. The opposite abuse, in keeping with our modern emphasis on personal autonomy and individualism, is the total privatization of decision making: my decisions are my own private business. We have already considered the necessary role of the church and the counsel of others in decision making—the corporate element of guidance. Proverbs 1–8 repeatedly appeals to "my son" to listen to the counsel of experienced, godly parents in order to walk in the way of wisdom and avoid the path of death (Prov 1:8, 10, 15; 2:1; 3:1; etc.). Indeed, how many tragic marriages might have been averted if such seasoned advice were more often heeded! On the other hand, balance is needed, as a couple is forging their own path in life (Gen 2:24) and thus must not abdicate personal responsibility to parents.

We have reviewed various hazards concerning decision making in the will of God. Each one reflects a legitimate element in guidance, which should not be emphasized to the neglect of others. And God *is* concerned about personal guidance and his purposes for each one of us, and he promises to guide those whose hearts are obedient and trusting. Perhaps the following summary on divine guidance from the famed George Müller, who had an unusually effective ministry at an orphanage in Bristol, England, and in global missions, will still prove helpful.

How I Ascertain the Will of God

1. *Surrender your own will.* I seek at the beginning to get my heart into such a state that it has no will of its own in regard to a given matter. Nine-tenths of the trouble with people is just here. Nine-tenths of the difficulties are overcome when our hearts are ready to do the Lord's will, whatever it may be. When one is truly in this state, it is usually but a little way to the knowledge of what his will is.
2. *Do not depend on feelings.* Having done this, I do not leave the result to feeling or simple impression. If I do so, I make myself liable to great delusions.
3. *Seek the Spirit's will through God's Word.* I seek the will of the Spirit of God through, or in connection with, the Word of God. The Spirit and the Word must be combined. If I look to the Spirit alone without the Word, I lay myself open to great delusions also. If the Holy Ghost

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guides us at all, he will do it according to the Scriptures and never contrary to them.

4. *Note providential circumstances.* Next, I take into account providential circumstances. These often plainly indicate God's will in connection with his Word and Spirit.
5. *Pray.* I ask God in prayer to reveal his will to me aright.
6. *Wait.* Thus, through prayer to God, the study of the Word, and reflection, I come to a deliberate judgment according to the best of my ability and knowledge, and if my mind is thus at peace, and continues so after two or three more petitions, I proceed accordingly.

In trivial matters, and in transactions involving most important issues, I have found this method always effective.[11]

In this final chapter, we have discussed the somewhat difficult subject of fallible choices. We are reminded that walking in the way of wisdom requires humility before God and others, remembering how we are limited and subject to error. Nevertheless, the good news is that it is possible to live at peace with believers who differ from us and that we can confidently make choices in life, knowing that "this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end" (Ps 48:14 NIV).

Further Reading

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Afterword

We have attempted to examine the central themes of Christian virtue and conduct in hopes that this book will direct its readers in the way of wisdom. We have taken an approach that attempts to thoroughly engage the biblical text rather than focusing on philosophical ethics, though, as we have seen, that has its place.

Though sometimes tempted, we have not held back from trying to address controversial issues. But we recognize our limitations about being able to speak a definitive "thus says the Lord" about certain topics and that we must be more tentative in our assessment—perhaps to the dismay of some readers. And no doubt there will be points on which certain readers will differ—perhaps frustratingly so.

As we have written a book that seeks to take God's holiness and goodness very seriously, we recognize that some readers may feel discouraged when they consider the gulf between the infinite God and finite creatures. While we should always be grateful for divine conviction in our lives, this is different from unnecessarily bearing the burden of a guilt that Christ is ready to forgive and relieve when we confess and repent. And let us not forget God's own self-characterization as compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness (Ex 34:6). What we in ourselves are not able to accomplish, God has done in Christ our champion (Rom 8:1-4; Heb 12:1-2) so that we might run the race before us with perseverance while the image of Christ is being formed in us (Gal 4:19).

And let us remember that as part of God's new creation in Christ, God has bestowed his gracious Spirit on all who have entrusted their lives to

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him. It is this Spirit who accompanies, strengthens and encourages us, particularly in the face of the evil one's accusations (Rev 12:10). We have other divine resources—not only the Word of God, prayer, the church and spiritual gifts, but also the sacraments that remind us of the depths of his love and the length to which God has gone for our salvation.

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.
Jude 24-25

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Notes

Introduction

[1]Bob Dylan, "Gotta Serve Somebody," Special Ryder Music, 1979.

[2]Scot McKnight, *The Jesus Creed: Loving God, Loving Others* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2004).

[3]C. S. Lewis, "Is Theology Poetry?" in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), p. 140.

[4]For the details on these and other principles of interpretation that are followed in our study of ethics, see J. Robertson McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible,* rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 2009). For further discussion on crucial presuppositions concerning the use of culture in interpretation, see J. Robertson McQuilkin, "Limits of Cultural Interpretation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 23, no. 2 (June 1980): 112-24; Robertson McQuilkin, "Problems of Normativeness in Scripture: Cultural Versus Permanent," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy and the Bible,* ed. Earl Radmacher (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984).

[5]C. Stephen Layman, *The Shape of the Good: Christian Reflections on the Foundation of Ethics* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), pp. 52-53.

[6]On this, see J. Robertson McQuilkin, *Living the Life 2: God's Provision for Christian Living* (Nashville: B & H Books, 2012). See also the various resources at Dallas Willard's website, www.dwillard.org.

1 Defining Love

[1]D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John,* Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), pp. 676-77.

[2]John 20:2 uses *phileō;* John 13:23; 19:26-27; 21:20 use *agapaō.*

[3]C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (London: Collins-Fontana, 1960), pp. 8-9.

[4]C. S. Lewis, "As the Ruin Falls," in *Poems* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2002).

[5]Samuel H. Moffett, *The Christians of Korea* (New York: Friendship, 1960), pp. 120-21.

2 The Objects and Conflicts of Love

[1]John Stott discusses the social, doctrinal and behavioral "tests" in *The Letters of John,* Tyndale New Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009).

[2]Taken from the film *Nicholas Nickleby*, directed by Douglas McGrath, United Artists (2002).

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[3]See chap. 11 in John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006).
[4]Jay Adams, *The Biblical View of Self Esteem, Self-Love, Self-Image* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1986).
[5]Vernon Grounds, "Called to Be Saints—Not Well-Adjusted Sinners," *Christianity Today,* January 17, 1986, p. 28.
[6]Stott, *Cross of Christ,* chap. 11.
[7]I. H. Marshall, cited in Carl F. H. Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), p. 483.
[8]One talent equals six thousand denarii (or sixteen years of wages at one denarius per day).
[9]Lewis B. Smedes, *Forgive and Forget: Healing the Hurts We Don't Deserve* (New York: HarperOne, 2007), pp. 3-30.
[10]Some comments in this section are taken from chapter 3 in D. A. Carson, *Love in Hard Places* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002).
[11]Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros,* trans. Philip S. Watson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), p. 48.
[12]Miroslav Volf, *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), pp. 138-39; see also Volf's *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996).
[13]Stott, *Cross of Christ,* p. 160.

3 The Law: Its Definition and Purpose

[1]John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* trans. Henry Beveridge, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 2.7.15.
[2]See Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah,* Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), xxxi-xlii.
[3]Douglas Moo, "'Law,' 'Works of the Law,' and Legalism in Paul," *Westminster Theological Journal* 45 (1983): 82; see also Moo's "Jesus and the Authority of the Mosaic Law," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 20 (1984): 3-49.
[4]N. T. Wright, *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), p. 116. See also Douglas Moo, *Romans,* New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).
[5]Moo, *Romans,* p. 217.
[6]Craig Evans, "The Function of the Old Testament in the New," in *Introducing New Testament Interpretation,* ed. Scot McKnight (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1989), p. 193.
[7]N. T. Wright discusses this point in "Jerusalem in the New Testament," in *Jerusalem Past and Present in the Purposes of God,* ed. P. W. L. Walker, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), pp. 53-77.
[8]See Scott J. Hafemann, *The God of Promise and the Life of Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), p. 87.

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[9]For example, earlier in James 2:5—being "rich in faith"—*faith* is the same as Paul's understanding of saving faith/belief, not the "belief" of the demons (Jas 2:19). See Peter H. Davids, "Faith and Works," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments,* ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1997), pp. 367-70; Douglas Moo, *The Epistle of James,* Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

[10]Davids, "Faith and Works," p. 368.

4 The Law, Christ, Salvation History and Obedience

[1]See C. F. D. Moule, "Fulfilment-Words in the New Testament: Use and Abuse," *New Testament Studies* 14, no. 3 (1968): 293-320; R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2004).

[2]See chap. 21 in Paul Copan, *"That's Just Your Interpretation": Responding to Skeptics Who Challenge Your Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001).

[3]Specifically following the Greek Old Testament (Septuagint). See G. K. Beale, "The Old Testament Background of Paul's Reference to 'the Fruit of the Spirit' in Galatians 5:22," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 15, no. 1 (2005): 1-38.

[4]Stuart Barton Babbage, "The Preacher's Task Today," *The Presbyterian Journal*, September 2, 1964, p. 7.

[5]Actually, *aorist* tenses which here denote the past.

[6]C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), p. 11.

[7]On this, see Douglas Moo, *Romans,* New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

[8]Anthony Thiselton, "Realized Eschatology at Corinth," *New Testament Studies* 24 (July 1978): 512.

[9]From A. B. Bruce, cited in John R. W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount,* Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978), p. 127.

[10]C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: Macmillan, 1982), p. 38.

[11]See David Kinnaman, *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity . . . and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007).

[12]Donald Miller, *Blue Like Jazz: Nonreligious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003), p. 115.

[13]On this, see Douglas Moo, "The Law of Moses or the Law of Christ," in *Continuity and Discontinuity*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1988), p. 218.

[14]N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), p. 181.

5 Sin: Its Definition and Its Origin

[1]See Herb Kutchins and Stuart Kirk, *Making Us Crazy* (New York: Free Press, 1997).

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[2]Wayne Oates, *Temptation: A Biblical and Psychological Approach* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1991), p. 13.

[3]From Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 14.

[4]Tremper Longman III, *Proverbs,* Baker Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), p. 329.

[5]Some of these comments follow Augustine's account in *On the Free Choice of the Will.* They are ably discussed in Scott MacDonald, "Primal Sin," in *The Augustinian Tradition,* ed. Gareth B. Matthews (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 110-39.

6 Sin: Its Descriptions and Its Results

[1]John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), p. 88.

[2]Langdon Gilkey, *Shantung Compound* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), pp. 89-90.

[3]According to New Testament scholar Thomas R. Schreiner, the NIV's translation of "sinful nature" for the Greek *flesh* precipitously introduces foreign metaphysical categories into Paul's writings. The correct understanding of the flesh-Spirit dichotomy is properly grasped in salvation-historical categories such as being "in Adam" and "in Christ." So *Paul: Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), p. 143.

[4]G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (Garden City, NY: Image/Doubleday, 1959), p. 15.

[5]Ibid.

[6]James Leo Garrett Jr., *Systematic Theology,* vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), p. 493.

[7]Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans,* New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 328n61.

[8]A. H. Strong, *Outlines of Theology* (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1878), p. 320.

[9]A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology,* vol. 3 (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1907), p. 553.

[10]The universalist argues that Paul's reference to "all" humans condemned in Adam are the same "all" who will be reconciled to God through Christ (Rom 5:18-19). Moreover, "every knee" will bow to Christ (Phil 2:10); "all things" will be "reconciled" to God (Col 1:20). Despite such "universalist verses," this doctrine goes against the general thrust of Scripture with regard to both divine justice as well as human sin and moral responsibility.

While salvation is universal in *intent* (God's *desired* will) and is *potentially* offered to all, not all *actually* freely accept it (1 Tim 2:4; 2 Pet 3:9); universal salvation is not achieved in *fact* (God's *permissive* will). There are those who ultimately *deny* "the Master who bought them" (2 Pet 2:1). And while all will bow to Jesus, they will not all do so willingly. In Philippians 2, Paul cites Isaiah 45:23, but a few chapters later in Isaiah, we read of kings bowing down and licking the dust off the feet of God's people (Is 49:23)—a theme found elsewhere in Scripture as well (Zeph 2:11; Rev 3:9).

Furthermore, Scripture highlights a clear chasm between the redeemed and con-

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demned: the sheep and the goats (Mt 25:32-46); the separation of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16:25); Jesus' terrifying words, "Depart from Me" (Mt 7:23; 25:41). Paul wishes he could be condemned for the sake of his unbelieving Jewish brothers and sisters (Rom 9:3), and those who preach a false gospel are condemned (Gal 1:8-9). Furthermore, the "all" in Christ in Romans 5 are simply a *subgroup* of "all" in Adam; they are not identical.

And what shall we say about Satan and those who side with him? Will *they* be reconciled to God? Revelation 14:11 says the opposite. They will have no rest "day and night." And even the "universal reconciliation" passage (Col 1:20) indicates the condition of perseverance: "He has now reconciled you . . . if indeed you continue in the faith (Col 1:21-23). Universalism fails to take creaturely freedom seriously. God will not receive those who have not repented from their sin. The Satan in John Milton's *Paradise Lost* says, "Better to reign in hell than serve in Heaven" (*Paradise Lost,* 1.263).

[11]C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1964), p. 33.

[12]See "*Hamartanō,*" in *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament,* ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 1:277.

[13]Jonathan Edwards, "Personal Narrative," in *A Jonathan Edwards Reader,* ed. John Smith et al. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 294.

[14]Ibid.

[15]D. A. Carson, "Perfectionisms," *Themelios* 35, no. 1 (April 2010): 1-3.

[16]See Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), p. 156.

[17]John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* trans. Henry Beveridge, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 2.2.12-17.

[18]In this section, we follow the insights of Cornelius Plantinga Jr., "Sin and Addiction," in *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

[19]Ibid., p. 140.

[20]Kent Dunnington, *Addiction and Virtue: Beyond the Models of Disease and Choice* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), pp. 62, 118.

[21]Ibid., p. 148.

[22]Augustine, *Confessions* 8.5. Cited in Jeremy Tambling, *On Reading the Will: Law and Desire in Literature and Music* (Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press, 2012), pp. 35-36.

7 Becoming a Virtuous Person

[1]Jean Porter, "Virtue Ethics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics,* ed. Robin Gill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 103. This discussion draws from some excellent books on Christian virtues and vices: Michael W. Austin and R. Douglas Geivett, eds., *Being Good: Christian Virtues for Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,

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2012); and Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung, *Glittering Vices: A New Look at the Seven Deadly Sins and Their Remedies* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009).

[2]This discussion draws from David S. Oderberg, "On the Cardinality of the Cardinal Virtues," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 7, no. 3 (1999): 306-7.

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[9]Jay Michaelson, "When Jesus Healed a Same-Sex Partner," *Huffington Post*, Aug. 7, 2010, www.huffingtonpost.com/jay-michaelson/when-jesus-healed-a-same-sex-partner_b_1743947.html. See response by John Byron, "Did Jesus Heal a Centurion's Same-Sex Partner?" *The Biblical World*, Aug. 9, 2012, http://thebiblicalworld.blogspot.com/2012/08/did-jesus-heal-centurions-same-sex.html.

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[12]See John Stott, *Involvement,* vol. 2: *Social and Sexual Ethics* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1986), p. 221.

[13]See Donald J. Wold, *Out of Order: Homosexuality in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), pp. 86-87.

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[15]Hays, *Moral Vision,* p. 381.

[16]From Richard Hess's email correspondence with Paul Copan, August 30, 2013.

[17]Ibid., p. 389.

[18]David F. Wright, "Homosexuality," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters,* ed. Ralph Martin et al. (Downers Grove, IL; InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 413; see also Wright's essay, "Homosexuality: The Relevance of the Bible," *Evangelical Quarterly* 61 (1989): 291-300.

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[20]Tim Stafford, "Coming Out," *Christianity Today*, August 18, 1989, p. 28.

[21]Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow?* pp. 82-83.

[22]Boswell, *Christianity,* p. 107. Despite his claim, Boswell offers absolutely no evidence for it, and he neglects noting Paul's clear use of Lev 18 and Lev 20 for his terminology.

[23]S. M. Bauth, "Cult Prostitution in New Testament Ephesus: A Reappraisal," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42, no. 3 (1999): 446-60, www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article_ephesus_baugh.html.

[24]See Wright, "Homosexuality," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*.

[25]This is precisely the point that is made (though not advocated as good) by Randy Thornhill and Craig Palmer, *The Natural History of Rape: Biological Bases of Sexual Coercion* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000).

[26]Paul elsewhere asserted that he and Peter were Jews "by nature" (*physis*, Gal 2:15)—that is, "by birth." For further commentary on this Rom 1 passage, see Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow?* pp. 68-85.

[27]Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth,* p. 133.

[28]John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of

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[30]See Richard B. Hays, "Relations Natural and Unnatural: A Response to John Boswell's Exegesis of Romans 1," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 14 (1986): 184-215. See also Donald J. Wold, *Out of Order: Homosexuality in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998).

[31]Hays, *Moral Vision,* p. 381.

[32]Some comments on this passage are taken from Bruce W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), pp. 110-20.

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[34]Hays, *Moral Vision,* p. 381.

[35]*The Social Organization of Sexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

[36]Gary J. Gates, "How many people are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender?" *The Williams Institute,* April 2011, Summary report: http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Gates-How-Many-People-LGBT-Apr-2011.pdf.

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[38]Robert Spitzer, "Can Some Gay Men and Lesbians Change Their Sexual Orientation? 200 Participants Reporting a Change from Homosexual to Heterosexual Orientation," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 32, no. 5 (October 2003): 403-17.

[39]Benedict Carey, "Psychiatry Giant Sorry for Backing Gay 'Cure,'" *New York Times,* May 5, 2012.

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[42]Elizabeth R. Moberly, *Homosexuality: A New Christian Ethic* (Cambridge: James Clark & Co., 2001), p. 2.

[43]Slightly modified from Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow?* p. 152.

[44]Anthony A. Falzarano, *Such Were Some of You* (Maitlin, FL: Xulon Press, 2009).

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[46]Ibid., p. 382.

[47]Ibid., p. 383.

[48]Ibid.

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[49]Ibid., p. 387.

[50]Jeffrey Satinover, *Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), pp. 130-45.

[51]Robert Carle, "When the Government Keeps Teens from Seeing the Therapist," *The Public Discourse*, Nov. 14, 2013, www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2013/11/11181/.

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[53]Tim Stafford, "Coming Out," *Christianity Today*, August 18, 1989, p. 29.

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[55]Here we borrow heavily from Mark Yarhouse, "Navigating Sexual Identity Issues," CCCU Critical Breakthroughs International Forum on Christian Higher Education, Atlanta, GA (February 25, 2010). Material from this talk can be found though a different presentation at www.henrycenter.tiu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Yarhouse-Homosexuality.pdf.

19 The Gay Marriage Question

[1]Much material in this section is taken from Sherif Girgis, Robert P. George and Ryan T. Anderson, "What Is Marriage?" *Harvard Journal of Law & Public Policy* 34, no. 1 (2010). See also their book *What Is Marriage? Man and Woman: A Defense* (New York: Encounter Books, 2012).

[2]This is documented by Robert Gagnon, "Obama's Coming War on Historic Christianity over Homosexual Practice and Abortion," available at http://robgagnon.net/ObamaWarOnChristians.htm.

[3]Girgis et al., "What Is Marriage?" p. 270. Sociologist David Popenoe argues that fathers and mothers make complementary contributions to the lives of their children: "Children have dual needs that must be met [by the complementarity of male and female parenting styles]: one for independence and the other for relatedness, one for challenge and the other for support." A child doesn't just need "parents"; it needs a mother and father, learning to relate to each in different ways. David Popenoe, *Life Without Father* (New York: Free Press, 1996), p. 145, see especially chap. 5 ("What Do Fathers Do?"). See also Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier, and Better off Financially* (New York: Doubleday, 2000). Gallagher argues that cultures and communities die when the marriage idea dies out.

[4]See Mark Regnerus, "How Different Are the Adult Children of Parents Who Have Same-Sex Relationships? Findings from the New Family Structures Study." *Social Science Research* 41, no. 4 (July 2012): 752-70.

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[6]Ibid.

[7]For much of this material, see Girgis et al., "What Is Marriage?" pp. 145-87; see also chaps. 10–12 in Paul Copan, *When God Goes to Starbucks: A Guide to Everyday Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009).

[8]On the damage of out-of-wedlock births, see Barbara Dafoe Whitehead's classic essay, "Dan Quayle Was Right," *Atlantic Monthly,* January 1993. See also the National Marriage Project website, www.nationalmarriageproject.org.

[9]See Kern's website, http://soerenkern.com/web.

[10]Trevin Wax, "Freedom of Conscience Is a Beautiful Thing," Gospel Coalition, December 2, 2013, http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2013/12/02/freedom-of-conscience-is-a-beautiful-thing.

20 The Christian Home

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[2]Eberstadt, "Eminem Is Right."

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[4]For example, Richard S. Hess "Equality With and Without Innocence," *Discovering Biblical Equality,* ed. Ronald W. Pierce, Rebecca Merrill Groothuis and Gordon D. Fee (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), pp. 79-95.

[5]George Knight, "Male and Female Related He Them," *Christianity Today* (April 9, 1976).

[6]See Philip Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul's Letters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), where he lists complementarians who hold this view (p. 118n8). He also lists many egalitarians who do (pp. 117-118n7).

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[8]Paul Jewett, *Man as Male and Female* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 137.

[9]Ibid., pp. 112-2, 138.

[10]John Scanzoni, "Pornography: A Symposium," *The Reformed Journal,* November 1974, p. 21.

[11]Allen Dwight Callahan, "Paul's Epistle to Philemon: Toward an Alternative Argumentum," *Harvard Theological Review* 86, no. 4 (October 1993): 357-76.

[12]See the summaries of scores of studies analyzed by Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, "Social Science Studies Cannot Define Gender Differences." *Priscilla Papers* 27, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 12-19.

[13]Gordon D. Fee, "The Great Watershed—Intentionality and Particularity/Eternality: 1 Timothy 2:8-15 as a Test Case," in *Gospel and Spirit* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), pp. 59-60. R. T. France, *Women in the Ministry of the Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2004), p. 72.

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[15]See Bruce Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of New Women and the Pauline Communities* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

[16]Kenneth E. Bailey, "The Women Prophets of Corinth," *Theology Matters* 6, no. 1 (January/February 2000): 11-16.

[17]See Philip Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul's Letters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), pp. 112-39.

[18]Fee, "Great Watershed," p. 55.

[19]Ben Witherington III, *Letter and Homilies for Hellenized Christians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Titus, 1–2 Timothy and 1–3 John* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), pp. 226-27.

[20]According to the standard New Testament lexicon (known as BDAG), Walter A. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature,* 3rd ed., rev. and ed. F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 150.

[21]Linda L. Belleville, "Women in Ministry," in *Two Views on Women in Ministry,"* ed. James R. Beck and Craig L. Blomberg (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), p. 127.

[22]I would encourage readers to read Philip Payne's *Man and Woman* as well as Beck and Blomberg's *Two Views on Women in Ministry.*

[23]Many thanks to Philip Payne, who offered very helpful comments on an earlier draft of this book, especially this section.

[24]Thomas Sowell, *The Economics and Politics of Race* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1983), p. 209. This present figure is adjusted from Sowell's earlier figures, when the earth had 4.5 billion people, with each person having 1700 square feet. Sowell adds that "famines and food shortages occur mostly in sparsely populated subsistence economies with abundant lands" (212). Famine-stricken Ethiopia has many times more acres of arable land per capita than Singapore or Great Britain (212).

[25]James T. Burtchaell, *The Giving and Taking of Life* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), p. 100.

[26]James T. Burtchaell, "Make Room for Baby," *Christianity Today,* November 11, 1991, p. 44.

[27]Richard W. Sams II, "Faces Disappearing: The Implications of Cystic Fibrosis Screening," *The New Atlantis,* Summer 2007, www.thenewatlantis.com/publications/faces-disappearing.

[28]David Popenoe, *Life Without Father* (New York: Free Press, 1996), p. 145. See especially chap. 5 ("What Do Fathers Do?").

[29]Brother Yun (with Paul Hattaway), *Heavenly Man* (London: Monarch, 2002), pp. 224-25.

[30]See chap. 9 of Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York: Mariner Books, 2008).

[31]See Christian Smith and Melina L. Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Thanks to Tom

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Gilson and Carson Weitnauer, who offer this summary in their book *True Reason: Christian Responses to the Challenge of Atheism* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014).

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21 Murder, Killing and Racism

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[2]See Lloyd H. Steffen, "On Anger," *The Christian Century,* January 16, 1985, p. 47.

[3]See Shelby Steele, *The Content of Our Character: A New Vision of Race in America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990).

[4]Comments in this section are taken from J. Daniel Hays' book *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003).

[5]See Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011).

[6]Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750 to 1925* (New York: Pantheon, 1979); Walter Williams, *Race and Economics: How Much Can Be Blamed on Discrimination?* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution, 2011).

[7]Walter Williams, "Should Black People Tolerate This?" *Townhall,* May 23, 2012, http://townhall.com/columnists/walterewilliams/2012/05/23/should_black_people_tolerate_this/page/full.

[8]For documentation of this, see Dinesh D'Souza, *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus* (New York: Free Press, 1991); also, part one in Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987).

[9]Shelby Steele, *The Content of Our Character: A New Vision of Race in America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990).

[10]Cited in Jason Riley, "Race, Politics, and the Zimmerman Trial," *Wall Street Journal,* July 15, 2013.

22 Abortion and Infanticide

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[2]For further discussion on the soul and the body-soul/mind question, see chap. 19 in Paul Copan, *Loving Wisdom: Christian Philosophy of Religion* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2007).

[3]Robert Wennberg, *Life in the Balance: Exploring the Abortion Controversy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), p. 71.

[4]Scott Klusendorf, *The Case for Life: Equipping Christians to Engage the Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), pp. 43-44.

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[5]Judith Jarvis Thompson, "A Defense of Abortion," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1 (1971): 47-66.

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[7]Daniel Callahan, "Religion and the Secularization of Bioethics," *Hastings Center Report* 20 (1990): 2-4.

[8]A. R. Jonsen, *The Birth of Bioethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 7.

[9]Paul Ramsey, "The Morality of Abortion" in *Moral Problems,* ed. James Rachels (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 12-13.

[10]Leo Alexander, "Medical Science Under Dictatorship," *The New England Journal of Medicine* 241 (July 14, 1949): 39-47.

[11]Malcolm Muggeridge, cited in Ronald Reagan, *Abortion and the Conscience of the Nation* (Nashville: Nelson, 1984), p. 21.

[12]See Francis J. Beckwith, *Defending Life: A Moral and Legal Case Against Abortion Choice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 108-11.

[13]Priscilla K. Coleman, "Abortion and Mental Health: Quantitative Synthesis and Analysis of Research Published 1995–2009," *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 199 (2011): 180-86.

[14]Michelle Bauman, "Extreme Abortion Rate for Disabled Leads to DC Conference," *Catholic News Agency*, January 19, 2012, www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/extreme-abortion-rate-for-disabled-leads-to-dc-conference.

[15]Noted on the *MacNeil-Lehrer Report*, April 22, 1980.

[16]Bauman, "Extreme abortion rate for disabled leads to DC conference."

[17]Edna Hong, *Bright Valley of Love* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1979).

[18]Chris Gabbard, "A Life Beyond Reason," *The Chronicle Review*, November 7, 2010, http://chronicle.com/article/A-Life-Beyond-Reason/125242.

23 Suicide, Euthanasia and Other Medical Ethical Considerations

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[2]Stanley Hauerwas with Richard Bondi and David Burrell, *Truthfulness and Tragedy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), p. 112.

[3]These statistics are taken from Thomas R. McCormick, "Human Dignity in End-of-Life Issues: From Palliative Care to Euthanasia," in *Human Dignity in Bioethics: From Worldviews to the Public Square,* ed. Stephen Dilley and Nathan J. Palpant (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 265.

[4]Hauerwas, *Truthfulness,* p. 114.

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[12]Some of these insights are taken from Gilbert Meilaender, *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 13-15.

[13]See Elizabeth Marquardt et al., *My Daddy's Name Is Donor: A New Study of Young Adults Conceived Through Sperm Donation* (West Chester, PA: Broadway Press, 2010).

[14]Meilaender, *Bioethics,* p. 23.

[15]Taken from Robert Wells, "Embryo Transfer," *Christianity Today,* March 2, 1984, pp. 28-31.

[16]Definition from the National Institutes of Health, "Stem Cell Basics," http://stemcells.nih.gov/info/basics/basics1.asp.

[17]An excellent website to consult is www.stemcellresearch.org.

[18]Elaine Graham, "Frankensteins and Cyborgs: Visions of the Global Future in an Age of Technology," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 16, no. 1 (2003): 29-43.

[19]Meilaender, *Bioethics,* p. 43.

[20]C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), p. 71.

[21]Leon Kass, *Toward a More Natural Science: Biology and Human Affairs* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985), p. 46.

[22]Some reflections here taken from Richard J. Poupard, "Self-Esteem from a Scalpel," *Christian Research Journal* 33, no. 4 (2010): 10-18.

[23]See John L. Allen Jr., "The War on Christians," *The Spectator,* October 5, 2013, www.spectator.co.uk/features/9041841/the-war-on-christians.

24 War and Peace

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[3]For much of this material, see Peter J. Leithart, *Defending Constantine: The Twilight of an Empire and the Dawn of Christendom* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), chap. 12.

[4]See Thomas Sowell's discussion in *Intellectuals and Society* (New York: Basic Books, 2012).

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25 Crime and Punishment

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[11]Leland Ryken, *Work and Leisure in Christian Perspective* (Portland: Multnomah, 1987), p. 151.

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[13]J. I. Packer, "Leisure and Lifestyle," in *God and Culture,* ed. D. A. Carson and John Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), p. 358.

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[8]Bill Clinton, "How We Ended Welfare, Together," *New York Times,* August 22, 2006, www.nytimes.com/2006/08/22/opinion/22clinton.html?_r=0. This has since shifted, with those receiving government assistance as of May 2012 being 49.1 percent—up from 44 percent in 2008. "Half of US Lives in Households Getting Benefits," *Wall Street Journal,* May 26, 2012, http://blogs.wsj.com/economics/2012/05/26/number-of-the-week-half-of-u-s-lives-in-household-getting-benefits/?KEYWORDS=number+of+the+week.

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[21]On this, see Craig S. Keener's *Gift and Giver: The Holy Spirit for Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001).

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[3]*Epistle to Diognetus* 5, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers,* vol. 1, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.iii.ii.v.html.

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30 Alternative Approaches to the Church-State Relationship

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[8]Ibid., p. 148.

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[17]Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), p. 11.

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[19]Beckwith, *Politics for Christians,* pp. 84-86.

[20]See Os Guinness, "Tribespeople, Idiots, or Citizens," in *Evangelical Affirmations,* ed. Kenneth Kantzer and Carl Henry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990).

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[22]Robert N. Bellah, "Religion in America," *Daedalus* 96, no. 1 (Winter 1967): 1-21.

[23]Beckwith, *Politics for Christians,* pp. 75-76.

[24]The three R's are presented in The Williamsburg Charter (1988), www.religioustolerance

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[1]See chap. 13 in Thomas Sowell's *Intellectuals and Society* (New York: Basic Books, 2012).

[2]See Timothy Keller, *Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2012).

[3]James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 9.

[4]Ibid., p. 27.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Ibid., p. 88.

[7]J. Gresham Machen, "Christianity and Culture," *Princeton Theological Review* 11 (1913): 7.

[8]As a sampling, see the *Lausanne World Pulse* (www.lausanneworldpulse.com/worldreports/595/01-2007?pg=all), the *Gospel for Muslims* website (www.gospelformuslims.com/mbb_testimonies.php); the video *More Than Dreams* (www.morethandreams.tv); and the article "Muslims Tell . . . 'Why I Chose Jesus,'" in *Mission Frontiers,* March 2001, www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/muslims-tell...-why-i-chose-jesus.

[9]George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (New York: Random House, 1984), p. 795.

[10]Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); see Craig Keener's meticulous documentation of miracles worldwide in volume 1 of his *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts,* 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).

[11]For a comprehensive introduction and commentary on Revelation, see G. K. Beale, *Revelation,* New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

[12]"Don't Buy Stuff You Cannot Afford," aired on NBC's *Saturday Night Live,* February 4, 2006.

32 Christian Engagement in Society

[1]Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Christian Manifesto* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1982), p. 130.

[2]Francis Beckwith, *Politics for Christians: Statecraft as Soulcraft* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), p. 116.

[3]See Mark Durie, *The Third Choice: Islam, Dhimmitude, and Freedom* (Australia: Deror Books, 2005).

[4]In light of our discussion of sharia courts, it might be worth mentioning something closer

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to home—namely the question of whether Mormons have the right to marry polygamously, as argued in *Reynolds v. United States* (1878). The Supreme Court correctly argued that, despite the appeal to Mormon religion, polygamy was "in violation of social duties or subversive to the public good." The same would apply to those Muslims pressing for polygamy in the name of the "right to practice Islam" in the West. See Beckwith, *Politics for Christians*, p. 116.

[5]William Bentley Ball, "Law and the Educational Mission of Christianity," *Theology News and Notes* (December 1980): 9.

[6]National Center for Education Statistics, "Fast Facts," http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=91.

[7]Cited in Isabel Lyman, "Better off at Home?" *National Review,* September 20, 1993, p. 62.

[8]Documented in Dr. Brian Ray, *Strengths of Their Own: Home Schoolers Across America* (Salem, OR: National Home Education Research Institute, 1997).

[9]Brian Stelter, "Nielsen Reports a Decline in Television Viewing," *New York Times,* May 2, 2012.

[10]Michael Medved, "Hollywood's Three Big Lies," *Second Pan American Conference on Family and Education,* Toronto, Ontario (May 1996), www.catholiceducation.org/articles/arts/al0033.html.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Penguin, 2005).

[13]From the foreword in Postman, *Amusing Ourselves.*

[14]Cited in Thomas S. Hibbs, *Shows About Nothing: Nihilism in Popular Culture from the Exorcist to Seinfeld* (Dallas: Spence, 1999), p. 6. Some of the comments in this paragraph are from this work.

[15]Jacques Barzun, *From Dawn to Decadence* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), p. ix.

[16]Ibid., p. xvi. The revolutions are (a) 1500–1660, the *religious* revolution (the Reformation); (b) 1661–1789, the *monarchical* revolution (the shift from kings who ruled over realms as *first among equals,* to ruling over nation-states as sole sovereigns with undisputed rule; (c) 1790–1920, the *liberal* revolution (the "French" Revolution), "by what means to achieve social and economic equality"; 1921–present: the *social* revolution (the "Russian" revolution), which is social and collectivist—the "the mixed consequences of all these [previous efforts]" (Barzun, *From Dawn to Decadence,* p. xvii).

[17]Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine,* trans. Rex Warner (New York: Signet, 2001), p. 1.

[18]Karen Swallow Prior, "How Reading Makes Us Human," *The Atlantic,* June 21, 2013, www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2013/06/how-reading-makes-us-more-human/277079.

33 Ethical Questions on Which Christians Differ

[1]This quotation is from a Presbyterian Church (USA) pastor in Tennessee named John

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Shuck. It can be found on his blog at http://shuckandjive.blogspot.com. Of course, this is not the official view of the PC(USA) or of many of its other ministers.

[2]See Bruce Fisk, "Meat Offered to Idols," *Trinity Journal* 10 (Spring 1989): 49-70; Bruce W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), chaps. 12 and 13.

34 Knowing God's Will in Matters Not Revealed in Scripture

[1]Garry Friesen, *Decision Making and the Will of God: A Biblical Alternative to the Traditional View* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 2004).

[2]A. W. Tozer, "How the Lord Leads," in *The Set of the Sail* (Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1986), chap. 21, www.neve-family.com/books/tozer/sail/21.html.

[3]See chaps. 5 and 6 in Paul Copan, *Loving Wisdom: Christian Philosophy of Religion* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2007).

[4]For example, see William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000); Kenneth Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009); also, William Lane Craig, "God Directs All Things," *Four Views of Divine Providence,* ed. Dennis W. Jowers (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011).

[5]Or more precisely, my divinely foreknown free choices have already been incorporated into the unfolding purposes of God in this world.

[6]On the gift of prophecy, see Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000); Max Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts in the New Testament Church and Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1997).

[7]James C. Dobson, "Why You Can't Trust Inner Feelings and Impressions," http://drjamesdobson.org/articles/impacting-famillies/why-you-cant-trust-feelings.

[8]See Craig S. Keener, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Account,* 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011). Volume 1 has abundant documentation of miraculous events, both in church history and in the present around the world.

[9]Robert C. McQuilkin, *Good News About Guidance* (Columbia, SC: Columbia Bible College, n.d.), pp. 5-6.

[10]Elisabeth Elliot, *A Slow and Certain Light: Thoughts on the Guidance of God* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revel, 1997), p. 100.

[11]George Müller, "How To Ascertain the Will of God," Christian Biography Resources, www.wholesomewords.org/biography/bmuller12.html.

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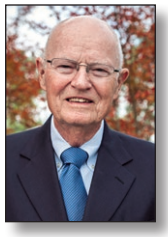

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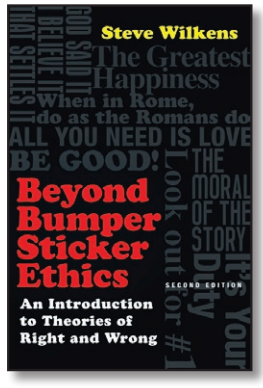

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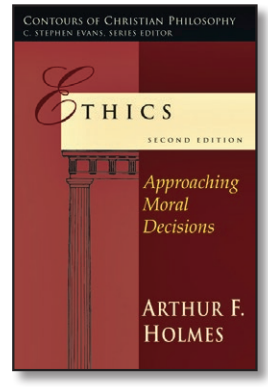

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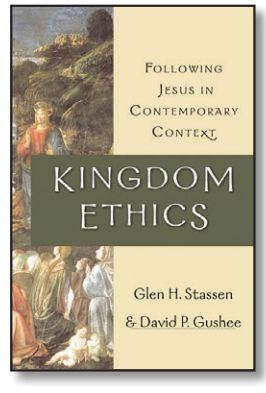

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