Introduction To Christian Ethics

Christian ethics has been a concern of the church through the centuries. Clement of Alexander was among the first Christian thinkers to deal with ethics per se in his work entitled, *The Instructor*. Hence, he is recognized as the “first professor of Christian ethics”. In succeeding generations such giants of the church as Augustine in *Morals of the Catholic Church*. Thomas Aquinas in *Summa Theologica*, John Calvin in “institutes of Religion, and Walter Rausechenbusch in *Christianizing the Social Order* had much to say in these and other works about ethics and moral philosophy.

As a distinctly separate discipline, Christian ethics, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, dates only from the Reformation. Philip Melachthon (1497 – 1560) is accredited with having produced the first statement of Protestant ethics in his *Epitome of Moral Philosophy*. Later, Schleiermacher (1768 – 1834) divided theology into two sections, dogmatics and ethics, giving the latter an independent treatment. Since this time, there has been a trend to treat Christian ethics as a separate and legitimate discipline.

The term ethics is from ἕθος (eithos) or ἔθος (ethos) and has relation to the home, the seat, posture, habit or internal character of the soul. Morals, on the other hand, come from the root word μόσος which means custom, and refers more especially to the outward manifestation than to the internal character. Christian ethics may be properly defined as the science of the Christian life.

**Teleology** – the term (from the Greek, τέλος, “end”) probably originated with Christian Wolff (1679 – 1754) and denotes the science of final causes or ends. It refers especially to any system that interprets the universe as having purpose or design.

**Deontology** comes from the Greek word δεόν which means what is due. A deontological approach looks to basic rules by which one can determine what is due in any given case regardless of the results.

**Teleological** ethics is concerned with the extrinsic good of acts insofar as they produce good or evil. Deontological ethics, looks to the intrinsic good in the act itself, independent of the alleged good or evil it may produce.

**Epistemology**, from the Greek ἐπιστήμη, “knowledge.” The philosophical investigation of the origins and structure of knowledge and the validity of truth-claims.

Think on this: is it ever right to lie in order to save a life? Is truth-telling more important than life-saving? What would you do? The various answers to this question can be used to illustrate six basic approaches to ethics which we want to
briefly look at. All the ethical views have to do with fundamental ethical questions, viz., are there any valid ethical norms? If so, how many? And if there are many ethical norms, then what does one do when two of them conflict? Does one tell a lie to save a life or sacrifice a life to save the truth?

Let’s look at a situation to get us into these six approaches to ethics. A U. S. commander Lloyd Bucher of the spy ship Pueblo, along with 23 men, was captured by the North Koreans. When the interrogators threatened to kill his crew, Bucher signed confessions, untruthfully admitting to the guilt of spying in North Korean territorial waters. These false confessions became the grounds for sparing the lives of the crew and led to their ultimate release. The question, then, is this: was Bucher’s lie to save these lives morally justified? Or, more broadly, is lying to save a life ever morally right?

1. View One: lying is neither right nor wrong, there are no norms. One alternative to this question is to deny that there are any meaningful ethical norms whatsoever. This position is called antinomianism (lit. against law). It affirms that there are no moral principles (such as “one ought not lie”) which may be validly applied to Bucher’s case and by which one could pronounce his action right or wrong. And if there are no moral standards, there can be no moral judgments. Hence, Bucher was neither right nor wrong ethically. What he did may have been personally, militarily, or nationally satisfying, but it cannot be declared morally good or bad.

There are various ways by which an act of lying might be “justified,” but there is no way that it can be objectively judged. According to the antinomian view, there are no objective norms by which the judgment can be made.

Lacking any objective moral norms, Bucher’s actions could be considered either good or bad, depending on one’s perspective. Since there are no objective standards, Bucher’s lie cannot be said to be either right or wrong.

What man ought to do is individualistically and subjectively determined. There are no objective moral prescriptions universally binding on all men.

2. View Two: lying is generally wrong; there are no universal norms. This is called generalism. This view would say, lying is wrong as a rule, but there are times when the rule should be broken, viz., when a greater good is served, and saving a life is certainly such a time.

Ethical norms are not universal; there are exceptions.

There is only one absolute end (the greatest good) and all the means (rules, norms, etc.) are relative to that end. In any given instance, when there is a conflict of means or norms, they may be resolved by a direct appeal to the utilitarian end. If lying in this situation would be more useful or helpful to most men, then one ought to lie.
Generalists claim no absolute norms at all. But it has one absolute end which functions like a norm in helping to determine a given course of action where there is a conflict of general norms.

3. View three: lying is sometimes right; there is one universal norm. This view is called situationism. It reminds us that since circumstances are so radically different there can be only one universal norm capable of adapting to all of them. For it argues that only one thing can be truly universal in all situations. It does not have laws for everything, and it does not say there is no law for anything. Rather, it contends that there is one law for everything, the law of love.

As applied to Bucher’s lie to save lives, the situationist affirms that it is right because Commander Bucher was acting in accord with the highest and only truly universal norm. Bucher is justified for lying in love. Lying was the loving thing to do in order to save these lives. His lie is judged right because it accords with the only absolute ethical norm there is, viz., love. A lie could be wrong if it were done unlovingly, i.e., selfishly (e.g., to cover up for one’s wrong). But if the lie is told for the sake of others, then it is morally right, according to the love norm.

The situationist comes into every ethical battle armed with but one moral weapon—love.

As far as other moral rules are concerned, they are helpful but not unbreakable. Everything else without exception, all laws and rules and principles and ideals are norms, are only contingent, only valid if they happen to serve love in any situation.

4. View four: lying is always wrong; there are many non-conflicting norms. There are many valid universal norms which never really conflict. This is called non-conflicting absolutism. Each norm covers its own area of human experience and it never really conflicts with another absolute norm.

There may be an apparent conflict between two ethical norms but never a real conflict of duties. There is always a third alternative or a way of doing one without disobeying the other. The domain of each ethical norm has been ideally or providentially allotted so that it never actually overlaps with that of another universal norm.

Take commander Bucher, if he was not supposed to lie under any circumstance then what course of action should he have followed? There are several things he could have done, but under no circumstance should he have told a lie to save the lives of his crew. He could have remained silent. That is, he could have refused to make any false confessions whatsoever. Or, he could have told the truth. Or, he could have asked for divine intervention to eliminate the dilemma.

5. View five: lying is never right; there are many conflicting norms. This view is called ideal absolutism. For instance, it is always wrong to lie and it is also wrong to
take an innocent life, and if one is caught in a real dilemma between these two, he should do the lesser of two evils. Which is the lesser of two evils can be judged by which would result in the fewer bad consequences.

On this view, Bucher would have been wrong no matter which of the only two possible alternatives he took. However, even though evil was unavoidable for him it was also excusable, particularly so since he chose the lesser of the two evils. A Christian theist might say that for Bucher sin was inevitable but pardonable.

It is called ideal absolutism because it believes in many absolutes which ideally do not conflict but actually (because of the sins of others or others sins on one’s own) do sometimes come into conflict.

Stated a little different, ideal absolutism is not willing to admit that it is even right to disobey any absolute norm. For those holding this view, it is not a question of doing the higher of two goods (for when norms conflict it is wrong to disobey either) but rather a case of doing the lesser of two evils. The evil may be excusable or pardonable because of the tragic dilemma one finds himself in, but it is an evil nonetheless. Ideally, neither norm should have been broken. But because of the realistically evil condition so life, what ideally ought not happen does in fact happen. And when it happens the best one can do is the least evil possible.

6. View six: lying is sometimes right; there are higher norms. This view is called heirachicalism. There are many universal ethical norms but they are not equal in intrinsic importance so that when two come into conflict one is obliged to obey the higher of the two commands. In the choice between killing and lying, both of which are universally wrong in the absence of any conflict between them, one ought to choose to save the life because it is an intrinsically higher value. Telling the truth is good but not at the expense of sacrificing a life.

On this view Bucher’s lie was right, even though lying in itself is universally wrong, because there is a higher ethical norm than truth-telling, viz., life-saving. Bucher followed the norm which was intrinsically higher when he found two universal norms in conflict. The good action is always the one which is intrinsically better.

It holds that there are many universal norms. It maintains that whenever norms conflict one is morally right in breaking the lower norm in order to keep the higher one.

Ethical heirachicalism is so named because it maintains a hierarchical arrangement or ordering of ethical norms based on the relative scale of values they represent. It implies a pyramid of normative values which in and of themselves are objectively binding on men. But when any two or more of these values happen to conflict, a person is exempted from his otherwise binding obligation to a lower norm in view of the pre-emptory obligation of the higher norm.
In heirachicalism, one is not guilty for breaking a lower norm but has an exemption from it in view of the overriding duty to the higher norm.

For instance, heirachicalism holds that lying as such is always wrong but that lying as transcended by life-saving is not wrong. In fact, in the latter case it is not really lying at all (in the sense of being something wrong); it is justifiable falsifying for the sake of life-saving. In Bucher’s circumstance, giving the wrong information was the right thing to do because it was acting according to a higher ethical norm.

The premise common to all heirachicalism is basically the same, namely, things are ordered on a scale of good, ranging from least to most good. Ethically speaking, some things are better than others. Values must be weighed, and one must act accordingly. Lesser goods must give way to greater goods.

In Bucher’s case, the norm against lying was not destroyed but it was dethroned by a higher obligation. Truth-telling was temporarily suspended but not revoked. No exception was made to truth-telling but an exemption was made in view of a higher obligation to human lives. Bucher’s duty to the lives of his crew was higher than his obligation to tell the truth to his enemies.

**Old Testament Ethics**

One of the tasks we face in Old Testament ethics is that of describing a period of history that covers more than a thousand years. It is safe and reasonable to surmise that over that period some fundamental ethical principles would disappear and be replaced by others, or at least be revised.

Perhaps the ultimate problem is the application of Old Testament ethics to those who live under the new covenant. Not infrequently, sectors of the church have, in the formulation of ethical principles, appealed primarily to the Old Testament and have ignored the New Testament.

Old Testament ethics are God-centered in origin, in history, in content and in motive.

God acts first and calls people to respond. This is the starting point for the moral teaching of the Old Testament. God takes the initiative in grace and redeeming action and then makes His ethical demand in the light of it. Ethics then becomes a matter of response and gratitude, not of blind obedience alone.

What radically sets humanity apart from everything else in the created order is the fact that we alone are created “in God’s image, after God’s likeness.” A person is not simply and image of God but a likeness image. He or she is more than representative of God. He or she is representational.
The implication for ethics seems clear if this is true. We do not have to wait until Scripture—“Be holy for I am holy” (Leviticus 19:2)—trumpets the theme of the imitation of God. In life and in life-style we are called to reflect the glory of God, to conduct ourselves in such a way that is consistent not only with our divine origin, but also with our divine mission.

I. The Patriarchal Narratives

To many Christians, chapters 12-50 of Genesis are not only familiar but very meaningful. For here are found at least three rich semi biographies of men – Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, whose lives are paragons of faith, obedience, and virtue. Here indeed we would expect to find public examples of ethical norms at their highest.

Such is not the case, however. A reading of the text reveals something of both confirmation and rejection of this ideal picture. There are, of course, before us in this part of Genesis illustrations of lives lived essentially on the premise of obedience to the Word of God.

But what shall we make of Abraham’s behavior in Egypt and in Philistia, two occasions on which he not only lied and enjoyed in deception, but also requested his spouse to make herself vulnerable for his safety (Genesis 12:10-20; 20:1-18)? The same thing was later perpetuated by Isaac (Genesis 26:6a).

Several observations may be made about the ethical behavior of the leading individuals in Genesis:

First: Their actions and the silence of God in response to those actions may be indicative of a growth in moral sensitivity, from the primitive to the more refined.

Secondly: we also need to remember that the recording without commentary or evaluation of an incident by a writer of Scripture does not necessarily mean approval. Silence is not necessarily an indication of approbation. Although the writers in the New Testament held up Abraham as a model for justification by faith, this does not imply that they were blind to some of the shortcomings of the father of the faithful.

Thirdly: perhaps the biblical writer has not bothered to comment on some of these moral deviations, for such moralizing is not relevant to his main thesis. He is more a narrator, theologian, and historian than he is an ethicist.

II. The Ten Commandments

The word Decalogue comes from the Greek rendering of the literal Hebrew expression, “the ten words”, found in Exodus 34:28, Deuteronomy 4:13; 10:4.
The Jewish ethic, which was the foundation of the Christian ethics, was itself founded on the Ten Commandments. But these commandments might well be called the universal foundation, not only of Jewish ethics, but of all ethics. They contain the basic laws of human conduct in society, laws which are not so much particularly and exclusively Jewish, but which are the starting-point of life for all men who have agreed to live together in any community.

Not without justification writers have appealed to the Ten Commandments as the foundational statement of Old Testament ethics.

It is important to note, however, that the book of Exodus does not begin with the Ten Commandments. M. Greenberg cites an ancient Jewish parable to explain why not. “A man entered a country and said, ‘Make me your king.’ The people replied, ‘What have you ever done for us so that we should make you our king?’ so he built them walls, made them water-works, fought wars on their behalf. Then he said to them, ‘Make me your king,’ and they replied, ‘Yes, indeed!’” Before God asks for the allegiance of Israel, he first of all demonstrates his worthiness to request that allegiance. Israel is challenged to loyalty because God is good and faithful and supportive. It is not coerced into loyalty because God is omnipotent and potentially intimidating and threatening.

It seems clear that the Ten Commandments convey duties for everyone, though they were aimed at specific persons and were to be obeyed simply because it was the Lord God who commanded. “Thou shalt” can be translated, “Everyone ought.”

God’s moral nature does not change the ethical standards that God revealed through Moses to Israel. These commandments remain as equally binding upon His church today. What was right then is no less right now.

How many of you could name all of the Ten Commandments? Today, we as a nation and sadly to say many in the church only know the Ten Commandments secondhand. This has had a devastating effect not only on our nation but on the church as well. We are tempted to think of the Ten Commandments as little more than a set of quaint rules, completely outdated for our modern world. But as the well-known TV personality Ted Koppell once remarked in a speech at Duke University, “The Ten Commandments are not the Ten Suggestions.”

**Why We Need The Ten Commandments**

Every one of us have laws and boundaries we must go by and respect. To disobey those laws and go beyond those boundaries has serious consequences. When our children were little we set down rules and mapped out boundaries for them to go by. Not because we didn’t love them or we wanted to see how miserable we could make their lives but because we loved them and wanted to protect them. Every barrier we established for our children was for their good, because we loved them.
In the Bible we find that God, our heavenly Father, has given us His Law—the Ten Commandments. Just like earthly fathers and mothers who give their children rules to safeguard them, God gave us His Ten Commandments for our protection and liberation. Although many people view the Ten Commandments as a “wet blanket” on their behavior, God’s Law is for our guidance, encouragement, and safety.

Not too many reasonable people get upset with traffic laws or the law of gravity. Without laws designed to guide our conduct, life would be impossible. Likewise, God has given to us His perfect law so we can experience what Jesus called the “abundant life.” If I violate any one of the Ten Commandments, I am the one who suffers because they are absolute spiritual laws of the universe. It would be foolish indeed for me to willingly break any one of God’s Ten Commandments, because they exist for my good and his glory.

Although God intended the Ten Commandments to provide rules for living, they are much more than a simple set of do’s and don’ts. These Laws were meant as a supreme gift from God to be cherished and protected.

The Ten Commandments deserve the highest place of honor and distinction in our lives. This is demonstrated by the special place that they occupied when God first gave them to the Jewish people. Before the nation of Israel could hear God’s Law at Mount Sinai, they first had to prepare themselves through ceremonial cleansing. From this we learn that nothing unclean can dwell in the presence of a holy God.

Furthermore, Mount Sinai, where God appeared to Moses, was to be off-limits. No one was permitted to approach the holy mount where God was. This reminds us that God’s Law was no ordinary gift.

God did not bother dictating His commandments to Moses for him to record. God was His own secretary! The very finger of God wrote the commandments on tablets made of stone. This fact distinguishes the Ten Commandments from all other books of the Bible, which were given to men by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Although the entire Bible is God’s inspired Word, the Ten Commandments stand as God’s personal, inscribed Word to man. “Then the LORD said to Moses, "Come up to Me on the mountain and be there; and I will give you tablets of stone, and the law and commandments which I have written, that you may teach them” (Exodus 24:12).

The New Living Translation translates Proverbs 29:18 this way: “When people do not accept divine guidance, they run wild. But whoever obeys the law is happy.” Unless God’s Law is our constant guide, all we can expect is moral chaos. Happiness comes when we obey God’s commandments, trusting that He alone knows what is best for our lives.

Are The Ten Commandments Still Valid Today?
People will often ask, “If I’m under grace, do the Ten Commandments still apply to me?” While addressing the National Family Planning and Reproductive Association in Washington, D.C., media mogul Ted Turner said the Ten Commandments are “a little out of date.” He added, “If you’re only going to have 10 rules, I don’t know if prohibiting adultery should be one of them.”

Sadly, many people agree with Ted Turner. The Ten Commandments no longer occupy the place of honor and respect they so rightly deserve. This is a terrible tragedy. The Ten Commandments are timeless. They are absolutely as important today as when Moses delivered them millenniums ago. We violate them at our own peril.

Yet today in America, a relativistic mindset toward biblically based morality is sweeping every area of society. A Barna Research Group survey asked, “Is there absolute truth?” Amazingly, 66% of American adults responded that they believe that “there is no such thing as absolute truth; different people can define truth in conflicting ways and still be correct.” The figure rises to 72% for those between the ages of 18 and 25.

The Ten Commandments stand as a towering refutation to those who believe there is no truth. The commandments contain the essence of God’s unchangeable and absolute truth. When we follow the Ten Commandments, we benefit because they do more than steer us in the right direction, they also keep us from taking the wrong path. They set the boundaries that protect from the quicksand we surely will encounter in life.

The Ten Commandments serve 3 vital functions for our society:

First, if obeyed, the Ten Commandments serve as a basis of trust within society.

When you are driving your car and approach an intersection with a green light, you proceed through the light without a second thought. Why? Because you trust other drivers to know what a red light means.

But in some parts of the world, drivers routinely run red lights. In those places, making it through an intersection becomes an obstacle course. What if there were no laws against murder or robbery? Your trust that no one would harm you would be greatly diminished.

The basic tenets of the Ten Commandments allow our society to function. Although our country is beginning to have serious problems in several areas that the Ten Commandments address, we still have social agreement on other areas which allows our business, neighborhoods, and government to function.

Second, the Ten Commandments restrain evil in the world.
Without laws that are fair and just, society turns into anarchy. Just think what would happen if we didn’t incarcerate murderers or child molesters. What if we allowed people to take whatever they pleased no matter who owned the objects? That’s the function that the Ten Commandments serve for society—as a guideline for identifying and punishing evil.

The Ten Commandments are the signposts of civilization. Where they have not been posted, humanity has been systematically molested, denigrated, and slaughtered.

**Third, the Ten Commandments elevate the quality of life for society.**

The matchless benefits of obeying the Ten Commandments enrich our health, our families, our finances, and our social lives. For example, stress can kill, but if you know you are okay in the eyes of God, where’s the pressure? Money is important, but if you know you are earning all you can honestly and spending only because of legitimate needs, you have enough and are content.

The view point that the Law does not apply to the believer today is a dangerous error known as “antinomianism.” But Jesus said, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled” (Matthew 5:17, 18).

The Ten Commandments are referenced in the New Testament especially in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus applied the true meaning of the Ten Commandments to His time. In Matthew 5, which records His sermon, Jesus makes reference to several Old Testament laws including sanctions against murder, adultery, and divorce. Jesus mentions these laws to refute the teachings of the Pharisees. They were a group of Jews who, in an effort to appear as though they were conforming to the Law, twisted its meaning. In time, their “commentaries” on the Law gained a higher place among the Jewish scholars than did the Law itself. For example, in these commentaries, the Pharisees limited adultery to the “act” and not to the private wrestling of the heart. Jesus reminded the Pharisees that the intent of the 7th commandment exceeded mere outward conformity but spoke to the lust of the heart. He made the scope of the Law contain the very sins of the heart the Pharisees thought they had escaped through legal hairsplitting. Jesus affirmed that the Ten Commandments are as vital to New Testament believers today as they were to Old Testament saints.

I know that the law does not save a person, it wasn’t meant to. The blood of Jesus is what saves us. But the law was given to show man what he really was. It was in a way like a perfect mirror let down from heaven to reveal to man his moral imperfectness. If I present myself before this mirror it shows me my imperfectness, but does not set it right. If I measure a crooked wall with a perfect plumb-line, it reveals the crookedness, but does not remove it. If it reveals to me all the hindrances and disagreeables in the way, but it does not remove them. The mirror, the plumb-
line and the lamp do not create the evils which they severally point out; they neither create nor remove but simply reveal.

So it is with the Law; it does not create the evil in man’s heart, neither does it remove it; but, with unerringly accuracy, it reveals it.

The Law has but one question to put to a man: are you what you ought to be? Let me ask you; are you what you are supposed to be based on these Commandments?

In Alabama, Judge Roy Moore was sued by the ACLU for hanging a plaque of the Ten Commandments in his courtroom. We live in a different society than we use to. But guess what, people might can stop us from hanging the Ten Commandments on a wall or displaying them in other places but they can’t take them out of our hearts.

**Commandment 1:** The word ‘before”, here does not mean “ahead of” or “superior to,” but rather “in the presence of”, “in addition to,” “besides.”

This is not a call to make Jehovah the first of the gods, but rather to recognize that He alone is God.

The first commandment is clearly a declaration of the unity of God.

The first commandment spoke directly to the issue of who Israel was to worship. Jesus affirmed this commandment when He said, “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind” (Matthew 22:37).

You may be thinking, “I would never bow down to some carved piece of wood or seek advice from a stone.” You probably want. But, the devil is far craftier than that. The “gods of this world” do not need to be idols in the literal sense, but rather they can be anything or anyone who we serve, follow, or honor above God. A god is anything or anyone who monopolizes our thinking and our affections.

Matthew Henry says: “whatever is esteemed or loved, feared or served, delighted in or depended on, more than God, that (whatever it is) we do in effect make a god of.”

Barclay says: “a man’s god is that to which he gives himself, his time, his energy, his thought, his life, that which dominated and pervades his life. And if a man’s one concern is wealth, then wealth is his god.”

**Commandment 2:** The prohibition on idols in Israel was not because they were material whereas God is spiritual, or because they were visible whereas He is invisible. It was primarily because they were lifeless, impatient and (especially) dumb, whereas the God of Israel was living, active and one who speaks. That is why the only image that was “allowed” was the one god had designed and created Himself – the image of God, man himself. It is man, as a thinking, living, choosing, speaking, moral agent, who alone reflects the living God of the Old Testament. Therefore any
attempt to represent God in static or lifeless objects, even a human statue, reduces Him and denies the most fundamental thing about Him.

**Commandment 3:** This is against false swearing, blasphemy and irreverent use of the name of God.

“In vain” – it literally means “for unreality.” The word describes that which is empty, idle, insincere, or frivolous. In other words the name of God must never be used in an empty, frivolous or insincere way.

The term “LORD” (which is printed in capital letters) is God’s personal name and is generally translated Yahweh. There is no name higher than God’s name. His name is supreme among an entire universe of names. It is to be treated with a level of dignity and respect that reflects who God is.

God’s name is so important that in heaven the very mention of it evokes worship. The angels stand around the throne and cry out, “Holy, holy, holy, lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!” (Revelation 4:8) The name of the Lord was so sacred to the Orthodox Jews that they refused to utter it aloud. In their Scriptures, they replaced the name of God with a code word so they would not be tempted to say the name lightly.

The name of Rockefeller will open the doors of finance; the name of Einstein will open the doors of science; the name of Michael Angelo will open the doors of art, but the name of God Almighty will open the gates of heaven and close the gates of hell.

Many people however, take God’s name lightly. We do this not only as a culture, but also in churches that have been influenced by post-Christian society. The sacred name of God is used so casually that many people have no idea of the power behind it.

The reason we become so flippant about God’s name is rooted in how we feel about Him. Jesus says in Matthew 12:34, “...out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.” If we respect, love, & fear the Lord in our hearts, we will not want to dishonor His mighty name with our lips.

Most of us think of profanity when we hear the 3rd commandment. Profanity is a terrible affront to God’s holiness. But we can also profane God’s name in other ways. Let us look at profanity and the ways we can take God’s name in vain.

Let me begin by frankly saying that God’s last name does not begin with “D”.

This is a cursing generation. Men curse, women curse, children curse, turn on the TV and there is a stream of profanity that defames the name of God.
Those who curse and say something like, “excuse my French” are calling down the judgment of God into their lives.

Paul urges us not to engage in profanity or unclean speech. He writes, “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers” (Ephesians 4:29).

“Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34). Poison water comes from a poison well. Pure water comes from a pure well. When a person uses God’s name in vain they are only reflecting the corruption of the soul within.

At first glance, the 3rd commandment seems rather straightforward. It is very easy to assume that because you do not curse using God’s name that you are not breaking this commandment. But there are other ways we can break this commandment and offend our loving God. One way is through the use of substituted words.

Do you remember Gomer Pyle on the television show Andy of Mayberry? He uses words like “golly” as a way to make a point or to show surprise. Partly as a result of the influence of this old TV show and many others, substitute words like “golly,” “gee,” and “gosh” are in constant use in today’s culture. But did you know these words are derived from the word “God”?

Let me remind you that the word “vain” means “useless, void of any real value, emptiness, nothingness.” We can use the name of the Lord in vain by using it as a by-word; to no purpose at all; by using the name of God lightly and carelessly, and without any regard to its awful significance.

We say such things as, “O God”, My God, Good God or O Lord” without even thinking of what we are saying. God’s name is Holy and righteous and we need to have a proper respect for it.

**Commandment 4:** The original design of this commandment was a rest from physical labor, and with it a spiritual design, that man, thus ceasing from other occupations, might hold communion with his creator.

The Hebrew word used in Genesis 2:2 for “rested” is the word shavath, “to rest.” This is where we get the word Sabbath which means “rest,” and it points to the rest day which commemorates Yahweh’s original rest from His activity of creation.

From one Jewish view: the Sabbath was instituted for those who are particularly burdened with work cf. Deuteronomy 5:14 and 1 Corinthians 16:2.

We observe here:

1. Man is more acutely aware of time, more than ever before, pressured and hurried by it. The speed-up of the process of production, transportation and communication
have left their mark on human consciousness in the forms of an acute awareness of the flight of time. The Sabbath should be a time when we move from secular time into holy time. Secular time is unrelenting speed-up. Holy time is suspension of our normal awareness of time, the absence of its normal pressure.

2. Competitiveness: it is a by product of the age of industrialization; it makes man look upon every other man as a potential or active rival. It alienates man from fellow-man. The Sabbath is the sphere of the non-competitive, for all its emphasis is on man’s communion with God and with man. At the very heart, the Sabbath withdraws us from the world of work, currently termed the “retrace.”

3. Man’s work: the era of technology and automation have robbed man of the essential satisfaction that work once afforded, the pride in what persons achieved or created. The Sabbath withdraws man from the world of work and transfers him to the world of pleasure; from the world of tension to the world of delight; from the world of doing and making to the world of being.

Ludwig Kachler once wrote, “Before God’s throne there will hardly be a greater testimony given on your behalf than the statement, “He had time for me.”

In the NT, the “Lord’s Day,” Sunday, replaced the Jewish Sabbath for followers of Christ because the Lord Jesus rose from the dead on Sunday (John 20:1). The Day of Pentecost also occurred on Sunday (Acts 2:1). As a result, the first Christians came together on Sunday, the 1st day of the week, to worship and celebrate communion (Acts 20:7). Barnabas, one of the leading church fathers, supported this view: “We keep the eighth day [Sunday] with joyfulness, the day also on which Jesus rose again from the dead.” Thus believers look forward on the first day of the week, symbolizing that we look forward to Christ’s magnificent return.

Dr. J. Vernon McGee explained what this change meant to him. One day a man came to him and said, “I’ll give you $100 if you will show me where the Sabbath day has been changed.”

McGee answered, “I don’t think it has been changed. Saturday is Saturday; it is the 7th day of the week, and it is the Sabbath day... The seventh day is still Saturday, and it is still the Sabbath day.”

Then the man who had challenged McGee got a gleam in his eye and said, “Then why don’t you keep the Sabbath day if it hasn’t been changed?”

McGee answered, “The day hasn’t changed, but I have been changed. I’ve been given a new nature now, I am joined to Christ; I am a part of the new creation. We celebrate the first day because that is the day he rose from the dead.”

This change from Saturday to Sunday is what Paul means when he writes in Colossians 2:14 that the ordinances have been nailed to the cross. All
commandments are part of Christ’s kingdom and we celebrate and observe them from that perspective. That is why we worship God on Sunday rather than on Saturday as the Old Testament believers did.

**Commandment 5:** The first of the moral commandments tells every child of human parents that his moral duty within the family is to **honor those people who gave him a place in the land of the living.**

The ancient word for honor was something like “weightiness”. To honor persons you had to respect them as people who carried a great deal of weight in your life. That is, you had to let them have influence, dignity, and above all authority for you.

God gives us examples of children who honored their parents. In good times and bad, Joseph considered his father’s welfare and took care of him in his old age by bringing him to Egypt during a time of severe drought. David made provisions for his parents when he was under siege by his enemies (1 Samuel 22:3, 4). Jesus took care of His mother—even at the time of His death.

We have no excuse not to honor our parents until their deaths. That is the responsibility God has given us as sons and daughters. We please Him when we obey the 5th commandment.

**Commandment 6:** The 6th commandment says, **“Do not kill [murder]”** (Exodus 20:13). Why is murder wrong? Because God is the Creator of all life so only He can take it away. To take life into our own hands is equivalent to “playing God.”

**Commandment 7:** Marriage is what the commandment is about; adultery is what it forbids.

Wilbur G. Williams: “It has become fashionable today to commit immorality. It is openly confessed on T.V. programs, widely practiced on college campuses across the country, academically advocated in many classrooms. Sports personalities boast about it, and even some ministers are advocating that the practices of sex outside of marriage between consenting adults is perfectly acceptable.”

However strong and persistent the advocates of open sex become, and however widespread immorality may be practiced, the Bible still commands against it, and that makes it a sin.

Adultery is when someone has sexual relations with someone other than one’s own spouse. The Greek word used for adultery, adulterer, and adulterous is **moichos.** It stands for one who has sexual intercourse with the spouse of another. **Hebrews 13:4** uses this word: “Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.”
Commandment 8: This is against stealing and dishonesty. This would include outright theft, expense account padding, cheating on tax reports, failure to give an honest day’s labor for the agreed upon wages, and the failure to pay a man adequately for his work.

Commandment 9: This commandment stresses the sacredness of the truth. It is against false testimony, perjury and lying.

Although the English form is false witness, the Hebrew is different. In the Exodus version the meaning is lying or untrue; in the Deuteronomy version the meaning is insincere, empty, and frivolous. The meaning is not essentially different, but it might be said that the Exodus version thinks rather of the evidence and the Deuteronomy version thinks rather of the spirit in which it is given.

In this commandment, the Lord bans lying, a poisoner of human communication, a destroyer of trust, and a dehumanizer of our neighbors. Lying breaks the tissue of faith that holds every human community together. Lies diminish everyone we deceive because by lying we treat persons as if they had no right to share in the material trust without which we cannot be human together. In marriage and commerce, in politics and law, everywhere people must trust each other. Lying casts doubt on the survival of humane and civilized relationships.

We are born with a tendency to be deceitful. The human heart, the Bible asserts, has been “deceitful above all things” (Jeremiah 17:9) since satan, the father of lies deceived the world with his blandishments (Revelation 12:9).

A commandment that forbids me to lie compels me to be truthful. It obligates me to be faithful to what I think, what I believe, what I feel and so to be faithful to the person with whom I am communicating.

Commandment 10: With this commandment the commandments enter a new world. Up to now the commandments have dealt with “outward actions”, but this commandment deals with the “inward thought”. This commandment lays by far the hardest task upon man. To control one’s actions is one thing. To control one’s thoughts and feelings and emotions is quite another.

The word “covetousness” is the Hebrew word beta, which basically means “dishonest gain.”

To covet something is to desire something which is not one’s own and which belongs to someone else. But that is not in itself a bad thing for one might honorably covet the great qualities which belong to someone whom one has made one’s hero and pattern and example. So we need to add to this.
To covet something is to desire something which one has no right to have or possess. The scriptures also indicates further to include dishonest and dishonorable means to attain what you desire.

**Ethics Of The Prophets**

Several Observations:

1. The prophets, like the compilers of the law, proceeded from the assumptions of the covenant. This made their messages both religious and ethical, with and intertwining which makes it impossible to withdraw either element without losing the heart of their messages. They never doubted that Israel was the chosen people of God and that righteous, gracious, but exacting God demanded obedience of his people. What they objected to, as the burden of their message, were the misunderstandings of God’s will which substituted ceremonialism for justice, mercy, and faith, and the apostasies whereby the people persistently violated their side of the covenant.

2. The prophets must be understood in both an individual and a social context. They were Hebrew prophets, not Greek philosophers of Buddhist Bodhisattvas, and they never dreamed of stepping outside of this framework. The message of every prophet was to every individual within the community of Israel, and neither king nor humblest subject was exempt from the obligation to obey the will of Yahweh.

3. The prophets saw with other clarity the persistent fact of sin, and saw it not as maladjustment or even as failure to “hit the mark” of some objective human standard, but as sin against God. It was rebellion against God and disloyalty to God that made the self-centered luxury of the rich, the exploitation of poor, bribery, drunkenness, and harlotry such evil.

The God who could not put up with sin would not save from destruction even his chosen people who persisted in sin. But neither could the God of mercy abandon his people to their sins. A remnant would return; the Messiah would be sent; the kingdom would come. Although one reads in the prophet’s page after page of denunciation and promised doom, it was never the prophets’ last word, for it was not God’s last word.

4. In everything the prophets said, they spoke to the current situation. They spoke to the people as they were in terms of what ought to be.
Divorce And Remarriage

“he who answers a matter before he hears the facts, it is folly and shame to him” (Proverbs 18:13, Amplified Bible). In the legitimate sense of the term, every interpreter of the Bible is prejudiced, i.e., is guided by certain principles which he holds antecedently to the work of interpretation. He, who judges without informing himself to the utmost that he is capable, cannot acquit himself of judging amiss.

Hopefully we will become informed so we can make a sound judgment regarding this whole issue. A lot of people usually make strong dogmatic statements about such issues without really studying it. The place to begin is with the Biblical basis of marriage.

Foundational to a Biblical understanding of marriage is the truth that marriage is a permanent relationship. Jesus said, “From the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife...What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Mark 10:6-7, 9).

Marriage is a sacred union, a work of God. To dissolve that union is to fall short of what God wants. Many young couples today enter into the marriage relationship with the idea that if it doesn’t work out, they can get a divorce. A marriage built on that kind of attitude is doomed before it ever begins.

God planned for man and woman to be together. Marriage is a provision of God for man. He had ordained it, and He designed it to be permanent.

In the Garden of Eden, God said that it was not good for man to be alone, and He designed a helper for him. He did not work out a trial marriage for Adam. He did not arrange a short-term contract. Adam and Eve were to be one flesh forever.

Marriage: it may be defined as the voluntary compact between one man and one woman, based upon mutual affection, whereby they agree to live together as husband and wife, until separated by death.

The word divorce is a terrible thing because it tears the spirit, mutilates families; and shatters dreams. It cripples lives with loneliness, grief, and pain.

The present day church is not immune. We are being inundated with desperate, hurting people, many of them believers.

Oh we protest, “but our church is against divorce.”

It does no good merely to be “against divorce.” No one in his right mind is for so painful an experience. It still happens, and more often to Christians than we would like to admit.
But in battling the monster, Christians mistakenly lash out at the victims.

In the name of church discipline we drop them from positions of ministry, and ostracize them from the community of believers for the crime of divorce—even if their former mates give them no other alternative.

We have pushed away unbelievers who have come to the church for help.

We’ve disobeyed Galatians 6:10: “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (NIV). We have also ignored the apostle Paul’s plea, “there should be no division in the body...its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it” (1 Corinthians 12:25, 26 NIV).

Christians are no less vulnerable to marital strife than unbelievers. Usually when Christians divorce the very people from which they need moral support are the very ones that turn them away.

Divorce represents a distortion of God’s creation. The Creator’s intent is that husbands and wives shall unite in enduring marriage relationships.

One of the main questions to consider is: Does divorce dissolve marriage? If divorce for adultery dissolves marriage, then there is no question about the right to remarriage. If it does not, then the right to remarriage must be denied.

Let us consider Matthew 5:32 (KJV) – “But I say unto you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery; and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.” NIV – “But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.”

In verse 31 Jesus refers to Israel’s official divorce bill used by the Jews for about 14 centuries.

In Moses’ time, as in other times many Jews were cruel to their wives, and because of their cruelty and hardness of heart, God permitted divorce. These cruel Jews divorced their wives for “every cause” (Matthew 19:3).

All a Jew had to do to divorce his wife was to give her the divorce bill in the presence of two witnesses. The marriage was then legally dissolved and both parties were free to remarry. This is recorded in Deuteronomy 24:1-2.
Divorce dissolved the marriage and the woman could “go and be another man’s wife.” If the second husband divorced her, then the second marriage was dissolved and she was free to marry the third time; but God specified that she could not return to her “former husband” Deuteronomy 24:3, 4). When the woman married the second time, she did not have two husbands because God spoke of the first as her former husband.

Denial of remarriage after divorce was unknown to Jews. On the question: what constituted lawful grounds of divorce, the schools were divided. All held that divorce was lawful, the only question being as to its grounds.

In the time of Jesus’ ministry, a heated debate about divorce was in progress. Hence, the Pharisees came to Jesus asking, “Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?” This question had provoked a constant battle between the two great rabbinical schools, the Hillel and the Shammai. It grew out of a difference of interpretation of the law in Deuteronomy 24:1 f. The Hillel (liberal) school took the passage to mean that a husband could divorce his wife for almost any cause. For instance, Rabbi Hillel held that if the wife burned the biscuits or put too much salt in the soup, the husband had grounds for divorce. Rabbi Akiba allowed a man to divorce his wife if he found a woman more beautiful! The Shammai (conservative) school allowed a man to divorce his wife only if she discovered something unchaste in her life. The important phrase in Deuteronomy was the “unseemly thing” which meant adultery in the thought of the Shammains.

Jesus took a position high above the whole debate, referring back to God’s divine intention and ideal of marriage (Genesis 2:24). Jesus’ critics promptly reminded him that Moses “commanded” the writing of a “bill of divorcement.” Whereupon Jesus pointed out that Moses “suffered” or allowed divorce as an unwilling concession to human weakness, “for the hardness of your heart.” This was actually an amelioration of woman’s state, conferring upon her a certain right. If she were simply dismissed, her lot would be hard indeed, for no man would take her into his household. Hence, she was to be given a “separation notice,” or certificate stating that she was no longer claimed by her husband, and was therefore under no obligation or tie to him.

What Jesus did was to set forth God’s divine ideal of marriage which is binding upon all believers.

It must be borne in mind that Jesus was not legislating, but setting forth the ideal of marriage. This ideal is impossible for persons married and divorced before commitment to Christ. And in the case of a very bad marriage, love, not law, must rule. In some instances, it may be the more decent thing to seek a divorce. But no divorce should be sought until an impasse has been reached and all reasonable means have been used to save the marriage.

Jesus for the cause of fornication approved the Jewish divorce.
Jesus did not introduce a new kind of divorce. He did not abolish all divorce. He corrected the abuse of the divorce privilege, but approved the right use of it.

The **privy divorce** was a merciful provision to spare an adulterous wife the shame and disgrace of a public trial in the Jewish courts. When a Jew placed the bill in the woman’s hand in the presence of two witnesses, the union was then officially recognized as dissolved.

The legal term “put away” had a grammatical history that always signified the absolute dissolution of marriage with the right to remarriage.

In all Jewish divorce history, divorce was called, “a cutting off.” The Mosaic divorce bill was called by the Jews A bill of Cutting off. The word for divorce (put away) is kerithuth and signifies “a cutting off.”

The Greek word for divorce (put away) in the New Testament is apoluo. It is the exact equivalent of the Old Testament word kerithuth, and it has the same precise meaning of absolute dissolution. It signifies: to sit free; to loose; liberate; radically dissolved; but loose, as a ship at its launching; to cause all obligation and responsibility to cease...The primary meaning of the Greek word apoluo is to set free.

In the Christ-authorized divorce, the wedding chain is broken and the nuptial capture is released. The marriage law has no further claim on the one released.

The Greek word for “except” in Matthew 5:32 is “parektos.” The equivalent of parektos (ei me) is in Matthew 19:9). It signifies “to take out; outside of; to exclude; to leave out; apart from.”

The word except has the same meaning in English as in Greek. Our English word comes from the Latin ex plus capere, meaning to “take out.” It emphasizes the idea of leaving out, keeping out, or even shutting out.

Jesus said the remarriage of the divorced woman would be adulterous, except for fornication.

Fornication and adultery are synonymous terms in the Scriptures and they are often interchangeable.

In Hebrew and Greek, the word fornication includes incest, sodomy, harlotry, perversions, and all sexual sin, both before and after marriage.

The Hebrew word is zanah, to commit adultery. Every form of unchastity is included in the term fornication.

The Greek word is porneia. It includes every kind of unlawful sexual intercourse.
Consider Romans 7:1-4. Divorce for adultery is not in view in this Scripture. It states the general law of marriage, but it is modified by Matthew’s exception for adultery.

In verses 1-4, Paul used an illustration from marriage to show that any power or authority that has been canceled is made void. We are “dead to the law by the body of Christ,” that we should be “married to another.”

Paul said a woman is free from the “law of her husband” at his death. The husband, by right of marriage law, ruled over his wife by the power invested in him. She was in subjection to his marital authority. The husband’s death released the woman from her husband’s power over her and the legal connection was broken.

Another important passage is in 1 Corinthians 7:10-15.

The word “depart” in verse 10-11 signifies divorce. The standard Greek lexicons define “depart” as: to leave a husband or wife; to divorce.

In verses 10 and 11 Paul addresses the situation where both are believers. This command from the Lord he now makes known to them, they are not to separate or divorce. But as Murray notes, “Paul recognizes human nature is perverse, that even Christians act perversely and not withstanding the wrong of separation or dismissal the parties to marriage may violate right and perpetuate wrong.” Should such a situation arise, the Christian husband or wife is to remain single or become reconciled with the spouse. Paul does not mention adultery as an exception to the command of the Lord here.

Paul is not dealing with divorce for adulterous marriage in verses 10 and 11.

In verse 12 the words “to the rest” make it clear Paul is talking about a different kind of marriage than in verses 10 and 11. Paul is talking about a Christian married to a non-Christian.

When the Corinthians became Christians, in some cases, the unbelieving husband or wife deserted and divorced the believer because of their faith in Christ. So they wrote to Paul for an answer.

When Paul says, “I say this (I, not the Lord...)” he is not suggesting that what he says does not have God’s sanction. Paul is writing as an apostle. Paul probably means that he does not have either a direct teaching that Jesus gave while He was on the earth or special instructions from the Lord when Paul was receiving from Jesus.

In the case of 7:15, the Christian did not divorce the unbeliever, but the unbeliever divorced the believer. In the case of verses 10-11, the Lord did not recognize the divorce as having dissolved the marriage, but in the case of verse 15, he did.
The key that unlocks the problem is the original definition of “bondage” (douloo). This word signifies “slavery,” “to make a slave of”…“held by the constraint of law or necessity in some matter “make someone a slave”…”be bound (as a slave).”

In substance and effect, that if the unbelieving mate attained a divorce, let him or her have it. The believer was not to contest the divorce action by any wrangling or legal maneuver to prevent it. God hath called us to peace. Bitterness or strife was to be avoided.

They were no longer in bondage to the marriage. Before the divorce they were in bondage – to the marriage. After the divorce they were not in bondage – to the marriage.

The meaning clearly is that willful desertion on the part of the unbelieving husband or wife sets the other party free.

In spite of Christ’s call for person’s to live according to God’s design in creation, and notwithstanding Christ’s word of redemption, sin remains in the world; and because of the consequences of sin, God still permits divorce even as he did in the time of Moses.

As long as there is the possibility of reconciliation, God intends for us to keep covenant.

Paul and Jesus indicate that desertion and adultery nullify marriage. If destruction of the marriage is reason for divorce, surely other acts that destroy a marriage are permitted. But only acts that destroy a marriage like enslavement and extreme cruelty on the part of one partner by the other.

Divorce is always a compromise with the highest ideal of family life. It is unequivocally wrong to compromise prematurely, or for selfish, petty, and individualistic reasons. Marriage is not a game to be played or terminated at will; it is a sacred and holy relationship. Only when it is clear that its sacredness has been irrevocably shattered should divorce be contemplated.

The Fall has distorted God’s creation. Instead of righteousness and harmony the world is now characterized by sin and brokenness. Like the Creation generally, marriage, after the Fall, is marked by sin, violence, hostility, and unfaithfulness. It is because of sin, Jesus teaches us, that divorce is permitted (Matthew 19:8). Because divorce is contrary to God’s will in the Creation, it cannot be viewed as having any kind of divine sanction. Rather than an act that God requires, divorce is a proceeding that God permits. In the words of Helmut Thielicke, “the divorce statute is a ‘regulation of necessity’ that belongs wholly to the fallen world.”

In divorce sin has been committed and hard-heartedness has destroyed that which God willed to be permanent. But before any remarriage is permitted, the Christian
divorced person should be faced with the wrong that occurred in the termination of his or her former marriage. And as Clinton Gardner has observed, remarriage should be permitted for the repentant and only for the repentant.

We have a responsibility within the Biblical framework to be compassionate even though people have made mistakes and in some cases sinned. We have to help them recognize the Lord’s forgiveness.

And if the Lord forgives them then we have to learn to forgive them too. We can’t continue to hold their previous failures over their heads. And this is hard.

We must let them know that regardless of their circumstances, the church is still a family and there is still a family bond. They are still loved and accepted as fellow believers.

If you go into the hospital for surgery, that’s an acceptable problem, and they pray for you from the pulpit. You know the church is backing you. But if you get a divorce, that’s almost unacceptable. So the church hides it and pretends it doesn’t exist. No one speaks to you about it. And you start to feel left out. We need to learn compassion.

One way to combat this problem is for the church to see that people are prepared for marriage and that they have help available to them when they experience marital difficulties later.

Unless we prepare people for marriage then we need to keep our mouth shut about divorce. How many pastors require engaged couples to go through eight to twelve hours of premarital counseling before they are married? How many require them to read half a dozen books on marriage.

Probably not one out of twenty churches gives minimal premarital counseling. But these very churches are very critical about divorce.

The problem is that many of these people should never have gotten married. And the church is the one that married them.

The commandment of no divorce or no adultery is the same as any other commandment. People break commandments but God forgives no matter what we have done. He puts our sins in the sea of forgiveness. We will readily let a person who has committed adultery or divorce. The same God who forgives stealing and murder forgiven of adultery and divorce.
The Christian And Racism

Introduction

In 1964 the Civil Rights Act was passed which was the most important law in the United States on civil rights since the Reconstruction (1866-1877). This act was designed to end discrimination in public places based on race, color, religion, and national origin.

In our day one would think that racism and prejudice would be somewhat a thing of the past. Yet in our day we find that racism is still a lively issue. A fundamentalist school in Greenville, South Carolina, Bob Jones University has reminded us that the issue of racism is not dead. Bob Jones University holds that joining of races contributes to ‘one-worldism’, which it says is man’s attempt to unite against God, and that God intended the races to remain separate when He dispersed the people at the Tower of Babel.

According to Bob Jones III, “three races descended from the sons of Noah: Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and God scattered them so they would seek him, not unite against him.”

The purpose of this section is to examine how the Christian should view racism from a biblical point of view. I believe that the Christian faith should be brought into dialogue with racism for two reasons: First, Christian faith provides authentic answers to the questions which racism poses but to which racism is able to provide only false answers. Second, racism is a phenomenon of modern Christian civilization. By and large, the people who have been the racists of the modern world have also been Christians or the heirs of Christian civilization.

This discussion will be limited to the white-negro relationship as found in the United States.

Before we go any further we need to define some key terms which will be discussed.

Racism is the theory or idea that there is a causal link between inherited physical traits and certain traits of personality, intellect, or culture and, combined with it, the notion that some races are inherently superior to others. Father Doherty defines racism as “a way of thinking that has dogmatized the notion that one ethnic group is condemned by the laws of nature to hereditary inferiority and another group is marked off as hereditarily superior. Its corollary maintains that the hope of civilization is in keeping the one race pure and eliminating the inferior group, or keeping it segregated.” I must agree with Kelsey when he says that, “racism is human alienation purely and simply; it is a prototype of all human alienation. It is the one form of human conflict that divides human beings as human beings.”
Segregation is a social separation, based on racial origin, whereby there is a mutual exclusion of both races from associating with each other or from entering upon joint enterprises or exchanges. In a broader way segregation is synonymous with discrimination. Segregation refers to a legalized form of separation regulated and required by statute or custom which has attained the force of law, which discrimination refers to separation effected without sanction of law.

Two other terms are relevant to this discussion of racism, “in-race” and “out-race”. The phrase “in-race” refers to the race of the speaker who makes the racist pronouncements or the actor who implements racist aims. The “out-race” is the ethnic group which is vilified, discriminated against, segregated, exterminated, or is to be exterminated in the great “eschatological event”.

**Prejudice**

Prejudice is a very complex issue as it relates to racism. Such questions arise as to what is prejudice, and where does prejudice arise from?

Joseph Leonard says that prejudice is, “a rash judgment not that a person has sinned, but a rash judgment of the intrinsic inferiority of either an individual or of an entire group because of racial origin. Race prejudice draws the conclusion that an individual is inferior morally, intellectually, physically, or socially simply because he is a member of a particular racial group.”

Father Albert Foley, S.J. writing from a sociological point of view says of prejudice, “of itself, prejudice is any preconceived judgment or opinion. It takes sides without due consideration, or because of irrelevant or even unreasonable likes or dislikes, preferences or antipathies, predilections or objections. Prejudice involves usually three elements: mistaken judgment, deviant will, attitudes, and concomitant emotional complexes. It is therefore not a unitary phenomenon. It is quite complicated, and each of its elements leads to further complications.”

It seems from looking at these definitions of prejudice that when prejudice is unraveled in some of its complexity that it will be discovered to rely on many previous and erroneous judgments which have been founded on such things as gossip, hearsay, rumors, and generalities.

Kyle Haselden in his book, “The Racial Problem in Christian Perspective,” feels that prejudice arises from pride which is something that can be found in every person. In other words prejudice builds off of this innate pride found in all of mankind.

Such things as racial prejudice, religious bigotry and social snobbery are things which are learned only because they have an apt and eager pupil which is found in the inherently prideful and instinctively prejudiced will of man. We do not have an inherent antipathy for certain colors or particular physical attributes; what we do have is a dominant, built-in preference for self over all that is no self.
Ultimately the best means of overcoming racial prejudice is, as Christians, to be able to say as Paul, “...it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”

**Racism and the “Imago Dei”**

Emil Brunner says that “the whole Christian doctrine of man hangs upon the interpretation of this expression “The image of God.” This phrase, the image of God, is universally shared in equal portions by every man no matter what other circumstances may exist.

Racism is in reality an indictment against God. It assumes that segments of humanity are defective in essential being. Racism calls into question the creative action of God. The fundamental proposition of racism is about the nature of man. By implication the racists affirms that God has made a creative error in bringing out races into being.

Whatever else the image of God may mean one thing seems to be evident that God has created each one of us as persons, as individuals made in His image. The Negro is not a commodity, or a political bloc, or a labor supply. He is not a category of crime, or illiteracy, or immorality...The Negro is a man, with the fables and frailties, the longing and fears, the hopes and hungers and aspirations of a man. He is an individual, unrepeatable, irreplaceable man who must be met and dealt with in his own right. In the past the Christian faith has contributed to the recovery of the individual. In the present the Christian faith has the great task of rescuing the individual from the powers which are hostile to individuality, beginning with that Negro whose face Christian people have helped to obscure.

The Christian concern should not be for the Negro as Negro, but for the Negro as a man created in the image of God. So long as Christians deal with the Negro as Negro we evade the central issue of his dignity and right as a man. The central question for us as Christians is what do we owe to man as man? Once we answer this question then we as Christians will begin to see what we owe to that man who carries the subtitle Negro.

Being created in the image of God does not mean that all men are created equal in abilities. What a boring and drab world that would be. However, men are equal to one another in all that is involved in being a man in God’s image. They are equal in being although not in performance; they are equal in essence yet unequal in capacity. Each one is equally dependent on God.

The most important thing for us as Christians to remember is that all men are created in the image of God and that Christ died for all to restore that image, which has been marred by sin. In light of this all men should be treated with equal respect. No man who has been created in the image of God, no man for whom Christ died should ever be treated as a mere means or instrument but always as an end of infinite value.
A Look At The Bible

In Genesis 1:26-27 there is no suggestion here of a white God or even a Semitic God. Nor is there any intimation that some who are thus to “have dominion” are to constitute a dominate race while others do the menial tasks of mankind. The doctrine of creation asserts unequivocally the unity of mankind and leaves no standing ground for racial exclusiveness.

Both segregationist and integrationist use the Bible to support their views. It is my belief that the Bible knows of no segregation which is based on racial distinction. Let us look at some of these biblical references which are used in racial discussions.

As was noted earlier, Bob Jones believes that “there are three races descended from the sons of Noah: Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and God scattered them so they would seek him, not unite against him.”

In commenting on this Bruce Waltke, the Old Testament authority at Regent College in Vancouver, British Colombia said:

There is no way to correlate the descendents of Shem, Ham, and Japheth with races in the modern anthropological sense. Caucasians can be found in each line: Israelites among the sons of Shem, Greeks among the sons of Japheth, and Egyptians among the sons of Ham. The emphasis of the passage (Genesis 9) is not the establishment of racial lines but upon the curse of Canaan, the son of Ham. To our knowledge Canaan is not part of the Negroed race.

The passage found in Genesis 9:24-27, the “curse of Ham” is probably the most widely passage used by segregationists who allege that, in the curse, God doomed Ham and his descendants (Negroes) to perpetual servitude. This was a common interpretation in the anti-bellum slave days. Yet this interpretation seems to be based on three fallacies: First, the curse is pronounced by Noah, not by God; second, the curse is pronounced upon Canaan and not Ham; and third, the descendants of Canaan were the Canaanites (Genesis 10:15-19), who were white tribes.”

Segregationists often point to the warnings about mixed marriages (Deuteronomy 7:3; Ezra 9 and 10). They emphasize that Ezra took steps to purge out the practice of intermarriage after the Exile. By doing this it points out the importance which was attached to racial purity by the leaders of the nation and their divine ruler. But from a closer examination it seems that this restriction on intermarriage was not concerned with the maintaining of racial purity but to avoid assimilation with pagan peoples which would mean death to the rue faith of Israel. Deuteronomy 21 provides rules whereby an Israelite might marry outside their own racial group, and thus the practice of intermarriage is not expressly prohibited in the Bible.
Also in the Bob Jones controversy, Bob Jones III used Acts 17:26, in which he says that God has set the bounds of people’s habitation. Jones did not use the last part of this verse which says “he made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth…,” which emphasizes the unity of man, not his separation. Haselden says, “The bible and anthropology are both committed to the monogenistic rather than the polygenistic theory of the origin of man. Both recognize that the physical differences between the races are insignificant when compared to the physical identities. All men are members of the same recognition and the practice of that kinship.

F. F. Bruce comments on this verse:

All mankind was one in origin – all created by God and all descended from one common ancestor. This removed all imagined justification for the belief that Greeks were innately superior to barbarians, as it removes all imagined justification for parallel beliefs today. Neither in nature nor in grace – neither in the old creation nor in the new is there any room for ideas of racial superiority.

Christians must believe that man has one Father, one creator; that He has created all mankind out of one substance and made them blood brothers; that all racial divisions of men have been equally endowed with capacities for self-fulfillment and have been given identical properties of mind and body; that in their biological and psychic sameness there are manifest imperatives for good will among men. When Christians develop moral and spiritual implications from these beliefs then they must move toward one another not as aliens who have no ground for peace and harmony but as men who sharing a common and closely related life, find some part of themselves in every other man.

Especially The Household Of Faith

This final section is especially important to Christians. Between Christian and Christian there should flow lines of communication which do not exist where non-Christians are involved.

I agree with Haselden as he says, “if there is a Magna Charter of Christian human relations, it is not Acts 17:26 but Galatians 3:28 and duplicating passages in the writing of the apostle; Ephesians 2:13-22, 1 Corinthians 12:4-27, Colossians 3:11.”

Here in Galatians 3:28 as well as those other passages Paul is confident that enmities, divisions, and dissimilarities are abolished by Christ who is our reconciliation and our peace and who in his flesh has conquered those hostilities which are native to all flesh. In the Christian fellowship there can be no “Jew”, that is, no ethnic distinction, for by implication, all racial dissimilarities are dismissed; therefore, the substituting of the word Negro for the word Jew in this text is both logical and, for our times, pertinent. The question as to whether or not a Negro should be admitted into the
fellowship of other Christians should not even be debatable; if he applies as a Christian he does not apply as a negro.

Paul in writing to the Colossians (Colossians 3:11) adds the word Scythian. Hippocrates describes the Scythian as:

Living in wagons, offering human sacrifices, scalping and sometimes flaying slain enemies, drinking their blood, and using their skulls for drinking cups. When a king dies, one of his concubines is strangled and buried with him, and, at the close of a year, fifty of his attendants are strangled, disemboweled, mounted on dead horses, and left in a circle round his tomb.

Since the Scythian invasion of the Fertile Crescent towards the end of the seventh century B.C., these peoples name had become a by-word for uncultured barbarians. Because of their cruelty they were referred to as the “barbarian’s barbarian.” According to this passage the “barbarian’s barbarian” loses all disgracing marks of class within “the household of faith.” Cato, the virtuous guardian of Roman morals, advised farmers to sell worn-out iron implements, old slaves, sick slaves, and other odds and ends that have no further use on the farm. Here, Paul invites all the odds and ends of humanity into the full status of the Christian family.

In Christ all of these barriers must come down – iron curtains, color bars, class distinctions, national and cultural divisions, political and sectarian partnership.

The only difference which God recognizes in man is in their relationship to him. Those who have come into the family of God through union with Christ are equally children of god, and can be assured that they are equally precious in the sight of God.
Abortion

The sixth commandment says, “Thou shalt not kill.” It is this commandment we want to consider before we talk about abortion.

If anything can be said concerning this commandment surely it must be that this commandment deals with the sacredness of life.

The word kill is rasah – murder, slay, kill. “You shall not murder” is a better translation.

Murder (Webster) – the unlawful and malicious or premeditated killing of one human being by another.

As a law of life, the commandment sends every person toward any neighbor in the human community who needs help to keep life going. It compels us to get food to hungry children – by all means available to us. It requires us to find free medical care for elderly people who cannot afford to buy it. It demands that we assist not hinder, the development of the unborn toward fuller human existence. Wherever a person needs a hand to help him keep body and soul together, the moral law compels us to reach out with ours.

God alone has the right to take life away, because he is the one who authors it in the first place. To end another person’s life is to violate this basic premise.

God does not judge the value of an individual life by what a man does with it (evil or good) but by what it is. Jesus loved Judas even though He knew Judas would betray Him. A human life has value as such because it is made in the image of God; it has perfections and powers as God has, whether these we used to glorify God or not.

The issue of abortion is very serious. Dr. C. Everett Koop estimates that Japan has destroyed fifty million pre-born children since abortion was legalized there in 1948 and the epidemic has spread around the world.

If the blood of Abel, one innocent adult, cried out to God from the ground, how much more eight million babies since 1973?

Up until a few decades or more ago the United States of America was one of the most difficult nations in which to get an abortion.

Every 24 hours, 3,600 American babies are aborted. That’s 1.32 million a year. And it’s all perfectly legal.
Background History

On July 1, 1970, New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller signed a law allowing licensed physicians to perform abortions through the 24th week (6 months) of pregnancy. New York quickly became an abortion capital.

On April 3, 1971, President Richard Nixon protested this act.

In 1972, Janet Roe, a pseudonym (fictitious name), filled suit to overturn a Texas law prohibiting her right to have an abortion. The Texas Criminal appeals court had ruled that the state of Texas “has a compelling interest to protect fetal fetus or embryo, except for the purpose of saving the life of the mother.” Since the life of “Janet Roe” was not in danger, the court refused her permission to have an abortion.

On January 22, 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court held seven to two that the Texas statute was unconstitutional, a landmark decision that not only emptied the highest court of criminal appeals in Texas of the right to interpret its own state statute, but also canceled abortion laws in all 50 states.

That decision made all unborn children “non-persons” under the law. It implied that human life in the developing child does not begin until birth. Thus, the unborn child cannot enjoy the protection of the 5th amendment (citizens cannot be deprived of life without due process) or the 14th amendment (guaranteeing equal protection under the law).

A month after the Roe vs. Wade decision, the pro abortion faction petitioned the federal courts to order city and state hospitals to make no charge to poor women and to require that state and federal governments fund abortions for the poor as a part of Medicaid. The courts granted the petition.

In September, 1976, the Hyde amendment restricted the federal funding of Medicaid abortions to those necessary to save the life of the mother.

Remember, man will not be judged in eternity for his deeds according to “Thus saith the Supreme Court.” But he will be judged according to what “Thus saith the Lord.”

Defining some Terms

Difference between birth control and abortions:

Birth Control is essentially an attempt to prevent more life from occurring.

Abortion is an attempt to take life after it has begun to develop.

Infanticide – the taking of the life of an infant. The murder of a new baby.
Right to life – used as an inclusive term for the opposition to abortion. It now carries more meaning than the right to be visibly alive. It has been extended to imply respect, even reverence, for fetal life as its development has become increasingly well charted by medical research.

Fetus – (Medically) the offspring in the womb from the end of the 3rd month of pregnancy until birth. Some say the end of the 2nd month.

Zygote – the fertilized egg.

Viability – the point at which the fetus is capable of existing on its own.

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecology has changed the definition of pregnancy from “that period from conception to birth” to “from implantation to birth” in order to make the intrauterine device (I.U.D.) more acceptable to American women. The I.U.D. prevents implantation on the prepared wall of the womb.

**Issue**

The issue at stake here is when does human life begin.

Is there any specific biological basis for determining when human life begins?

1. Many feel that at conception when the 23 chromosomes of the sperm unite with the 23 of the egg that life begins.

   The instant a sperm fertilizes a new unique person exists in our world. Here at the very beginning, we have the complete chromosomal kit from which the very specific individual emerges who will live and die as God’s very special image.

2. Some feel that life begins when the Zygote or fertilized egg is planted in the womb (uterus). Then they say the soul is given.

3. For others it is the moment of viability. Until about 1970, a fetus had to be a 1,000 grams in order to survive. By 1985, we are told, neonatologists will push viability below the 500 gram mark. Some predict that fetuses of 2 ounces – less than 60 grams – will be kept alive outside of the mother’s womb.

4. Some say when the soul’s arrival takes place is at the presence of an electrical impulse from the brain – near the end of the third month.

   Many don’t know that by the 21st day, the baby’s heart demonstrates its first feeble beats. By the 6th week the adrenal gland and they thyroid are functioning. A child’s fingerprints are indelibly in place by the 12th week.
5. Others feel a fetus becomes a person when it is born. With this view the fetus can be aborted at any time prior to birth.

A man by the name of Dr. Kenneth Edelin, of Boston, was convicted of manslaughter for abandoning a post-abortion baby.

**Scriptural Basis For Fetal Life At Conception**

**Psalm 139:13, 15 (RSV)** – “(13) For thou didst form my inward parts, thou didst knit me together in my mother’s womb... (15) My face was not hidden from thee when I was being made in secret, intricately wrought in the depths of the earth.”

**Psalm 139:13-15 (NIV)** – “(13) For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. (14) I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. (15) 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.”

**Jeremiah 1:5** - "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations."

Before the prophets body took on the form of a human being, before there was a heart or heartbeat, a brain or brainwave, God knew Jeremiah and consecrated him as a prophet.

John the Baptist was filled with the Holy spirit “from his mother’s womb” (Luke 1:15). To the Holy Spirit, John the Baptist was obviously a “person” from his conception.

After Elizabeth had been carrying John the Baptist for six months, she was visited by Mary, the mother of Jesus. As soon as the voice of Mary’s salutation reached Elizabeth’s ears, “the babe leaped in her womb for joy” (Luke 1:43). There is no doubt, that Jesus was a living human being then, although it could have been no more than four weeks since he had been conceived by the Holy Spirit in Mary’s womb.

**Problem Areas**

1. **Welfare of the future child.**

   a. That children who are unwanted should not be allowed to enter this world. This is a very slippery excuse. “Unwanted” is not really a description of the child. The child is desirable even if the mother doesn’t desire it.
It has been said “the right to abortion is the foundation of society’s long, long struggle to guarantee that every child comes into the world along with all birth control measures, must establish the century of the wanted child.”

b. Yet suppose a child will be born with a disease such as Tay Sacks. Example: here is a Jewish woman whose baby she knows from amniocentesis (a test) will be a victim of Tay Sacks disease. This disease strikes Jewish children of Eastern European background. It is untreatable and fatal. An inherited lethal condition of blindness and mental retardation. It kills painfully after a miserable brief life. This is her third pregnancy; the first two were miscarried. Now three months after conception she decides to abort this child.

Is it better not to exist at all than to die at age two from a horrendous disease?

If a person will be sub-human and not just deformed maybe abortion is an answer. But remember handicaps do not destroy one’s humanity. In face, they often enhance the truly human characteristics in both the handicapped and those who work with them.

At what stage does a fetus become abnormal? How many faculties must be distorted? Who makes this decision? The government? The individual? The A.M.A.?

2. What about Rape?

No person or woman should be forced to carry a child where she did not consent to the sexual act. The mother has a right to refuse that her body be used as an object of sexual intrusion. The violation of her honor and personhood was enough evil without compounding her plight by forcing an unwanted child on her.

We do better to suspend judgment sometimes than to condemn every abortion as murder and every abortionist as a murderer.

**Malcom Muggeridge**

For we can survive energy crisis, inflation, wars, revolutions, and insurrections, as they have been survived in the past, but if we transgress against the very basis of our mortal existence, becoming our own gods in our own universe, then we shall surely and deservedly perish from the earth.
Mercy Killing

What should the Christian do to a man hopelessly caught in a burning airplane who begs to be shot? Or, when a monstrously deformed baby is born, and suddenly stops breathing, is the doctor morally obligated to resuscitate it? Would it not be more merciful to let it die? Again, say a man with an incurable disease is being kept alive only by a machine. If the plug is pulled out he will die; if he lives it will only be artificially in a king of “vegetable” existence. What is the moral obligation of the doctor? When, if ever, is life-taking morally justifiable?

Doctors usually make a clean distinction between causing death and allowing it, and most of the rest of us agree that letting people die has a different moral “feel” to it than does causing people to die.

Some reasons why someone might permit another person to die:

1. **Bodies without persons.** When does personhood end is the question here. For instance, if we know a person’s brain will not function again we might consider letting that person die.

2. **Dying people.** We might ask the question, when does dying begin?

3. **People without a personal future.** Now and then, children are born into our world with no apparent possibility of being a personal life. A child who will, as far as we can tell, never respond to another person, never convey a message, never enter into a conscious relationship.

Who is to decide this? The moral question of letting a human being die centers on doctors because they have the vocation and the art and tools for keeping people alive. But other people are involved too: the patient, the patient’s family, the nurses who care for the patient hourly, and pastors, who represent the care of God for the whole person.

May God alone decide? Believers with a strong sense of divine sovereignty may claim that God alone has the authority to determine life’s end for his children. Only the creator of life has the right to decide where a person should die. For mere human beings to assume the role of determiners of death is to play God.

Yet we cannot run away from the responsibility that we are to act as God’s agents on earth.

When we give life, we believe that we are cooperating with God, because God supports personal life. But suppose that our machines are forcing someone to live whom God wants to die, and who would die if we left him alone. Would that not be
just as arrogant? A mere human medical technologist says to be patient, in effect: “You will die when I get ready to let you die.” Isn’t this also to make believe we are God?

The objection that miracles do happen even in supposedly “incurable cases” is sometimes leveled against allowing mercy-dyings. Why not keep the person alive and pray for a miracle? Or maybe a cure will be discovered by scientists if the individual can be kept alive long enough. Id does need to be pointed out that one should be kept alive as long as there is any reason for hope (medically or supernaturally) that he can recover to a meaningful human life. However, when both God and medical science have been given ample opportunity to cure the disease and yet it appears beyond all reasonable doubt that this patient will have little more than a “vegetable” type existence, then one may conclude that God wants him to die a natural death. The basic moral principle behind this conclusion is that one ought not perpetuate on inhumanity while futilely waiting for a miracle. Hoping for a cure without any assurance it will come while one delays an act of natural mercy does not seem morally justifiable.
Suicide

There are three basic attitudes toward the morality of suicide:

1. **That it is a sin, a moral wrong forbidden by God.**

2. **That it is a legitimate option for any person to take if he or she chooses.**

3. **That it is a tragedy, to be prevented if possible, lamented but not morally judged.**

**Suicide condemned as a moral wrong.** The Synod of Arles (A.D. 553) condemned it and later synods decreed that no prayers should be said for a person who died by his own hands.

Thomas Aquinas offered three reasons why it was wrong:

1. **Suicide is a sin against one’s own nature.** It is the nature of every living thing to want life and to destroy our own life is to act in a most unnatural way.

2. **It is a sin against one’s community.** To cause our death is to deprive our family and friends of the support, care, communion, and love they need from us.

3. **It is a sin against God.** God alone has the right to take our life, as he alone has the power and goodness to give it.

As far as Scripture is concerned, suicide comes under the prohibition of murder. It is at least as wrong illicitly to take one’s own life as it is to take the life of another.

**Suicide justified as a responsible option.** Some people have received the ancient Stoic notion that any responsible person has the moral right to end his life whenever death seems a reasonable alternative to the cruel circumstances of one’s life. Suicide, then, is a choice to cut off the meaningless tail-end that remains. In short, the conditions of life may make the choice of death a reasonable one. We of course reject this view.

Suicide is based on a man’s wish to be relieved of the (miserable) kind of existence he has, despite the fact that he wills existence itself. As Augustine said, suicide is a failure of courage. It is contrary to one’s basic drive for being; suicide is a desire for non-being. Briefly put, suicide is not a philosophical problem at all; rather, it is a moral and/or psychological problem. *Men do not attempt suicide because it is the most reasonable thing to do but because it is the “easy” way out of their problem.*
Suicide excused as tragedy. With a bit of compassionate insight, we may excuse a person who commits suicide as a victim of forces beyond his control rather than as a free agent choosing death above life.

Sigmund Freud said that we have two conflicting forces within us, the power of eros (sexual love), which drives us to love and life, and the power of thanatos (death), which drives us to despair and death. If Freud was right, it is no moral wrong if the power of thanatos happens to be stronger in a person than the power of eros. If, as Carl Jung put it, we are all children of both life and darkness, with a few of us destined to be overcome by darkness, suicide is only a tragedy, not a moral choice.

But suicide is a moral choice.

No Christian believer can doubt that joy is his calling in life, his very end and purpose. Why else would the Bible constantly tell us to rejoice in the Lord? Why else would it promise us joy, perfectly and fully in the kingdom of God? Where life is experienced in joy, despair is excluded. So is suicide.

What is joy? Joy is the experience of gratitude, of being glad for life in the presence of the Giver of life. Joy is also the will to give back to another something of what one is or has for the sheer desire of sharing the gift. Joy is a blend of gratitude and giving.

As far as Scriptures are concerned, suicide comes under the prohibition of murder. It is at least as wrong illicitly to take one’s own life as it is to take the life of another.

In the Old Testament there are four clear cases of suicide and one suicide/revenge killing

1. Samson, Judges 16
2. Saul and his armor bearer, 1 Samuel 31
3. Ahithophel, 2 Samuel 16-17
4. Zimri, 1 Kings 16


The suicide/revenge killing is a familiar story. Samson, a captive, blinded by the Philistines, found himself in a position where he could cause many Philistine deaths. But the cost was his own life, which he gave without hesitation (Judges 16).

Ahithophel (II Samuel 16-17) was an advisor to King David. When David’s son, Absalom, revolted against his father, Ahithophel abandoned David and joined the revolution. He suggested a strategy to Absalom which would surely have defeated
David. His advice went unheeded, however, and Absalom failed in his bid for the kingdom. Ahithophel knew he would be executed as a traitor, his family shamed and likely experience retaliation. So he went home, “put his house in order and hanged himself.” He was buried in the tomb of his ancestors.

Possibly the best-known suicide is that of Judas Iscariot. Remorseful but not repentant, Judas hanged himself after betraying Jesus (Matthew 27).

**Do All Who Commit Suicide Go To Hell?**

*Deuteronomy 29:29* - "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.

*1 Corinthians 4:5* – “Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God.”

Some people believe that all who commit suicide go immediately to Hell. **However, the Bible never says if this is the case.** The Bible is silent on this issue. God probably did not address it in black and white for a good reason. If we knew that we would still go to Heaven if we killed ourselves, there would probably be a lot more suicides taking place than there already are. However, if we knew that all who killed themselves were automatically banished to Hell, no matter what their situation, it may be too much for the grief-stricken family and friends to bear. Murder and suicide are not unpardonable sins. The only unforgivable sins are rejecting Christ (Mark 16:16) and blaspheming the Holy Spirit.

It is so important to remember that God judges each of us individually, weighing all the factors of our lives, our beliefs and our motives. Each one of us is so intricate and complex, only God could really judge us in total truth, wisdom, and without favoritism. The most important truth of all, is that each one of us will stand before His throne and give account of our lives.

The inability to cope with failure. The inability to deal with relationships. The perceived loss of position or status. The unbearable pain of humiliation and a meaningless life. These were some of the reasons given for those who committed suicide during biblical times. A closer examination of the alarming number of suicides today reveals five motivating factors: (1) a cause that a person is committed to; (2) a pact between two or more people; (3) feelings of meaninglessness; (4) circumstances that overwhelm an individual; and (5) an extended illness involving intractable or unrelenting pain (note the growing debate regarding assisted suicide).

No matter what mode of suicide a person chooses, if we were to somehow explore the thoughts of those who have committed suicide (or are contemplating it), I believe that we would find one of these five motivating factors. The death certificate may list
drug overdose or gunshot wound as the cause of death; yet the underlying cause often is never discovered because of the self-imposed isolation that most people experience prior to their suicide. We see the result on the coroner's report, but the true cause can usually be found within the list of these motivating factors.

A major cause of suicide is the despair of living without meaning or purpose. In a world overwhelmed with violence, divorce, homelessness, AIDS, and drug abuse, it is too often the norm to live life bouncing around without anything to hang on to that would give meaning and security to an otherwise lonely existence.

In his book *Fatal Choice*, John Q. Baucom states that of all the suicides committed by teenagers in 1984, 80% had alcohol in their systems: "Suicide is the second leading cause of death among teenagers. It is estimated that approximately 6,000 adolescents will take their lives annually . . . During the past 25 years the teenage rate has tripled. One report indicates that nearly 12 percent of all school children will experience serious suicidal ideation at least once."

The fact that many children are finding suicide to be the logical choice underscores the impact that the pressures of life, even at such an early age, can have. They live in a world of isolation, rejection, and the perception that no one cares. Life becomes intolerable, and suicide becomes the "logical" answer. Depression is a key factor in most suicides.

Many of the greatest saints and heroes of the Bible faced overwhelming depression and sometimes wrote that they wished they had never even been born. King David, *(Psalm 13:2-4)*, the prophet Jeremiah, *(Jeremiah 20:14-18)*, and Job, *(Job 7:15-16)* among others, all reached low points where they despaired of their very lives.

Yet, each one of these men were blessed of God, and persevered through their trials as an example to us. Though they faced great suffering and injustice, they kept their faith in God and His goodness and in so doing, were sustained and led into abundant life.

Depression is often anger, and a host of other emotions that have turned inward and become frozen. If you are carrying anger, resentment, bitterness, unforgiveness, frustration, jealousy, despair, worthlessness, hopelessness, fearfulness, vengeance and/or self-pity in your heart, you can turn these things over to God and begin to receive your healing right now, in faith. If you don't know how to let them go, confess it to God and ask for His help in releasing it to Him. No one can overcome these things by themselves. We all need the power of God to set us free from sinful and hopeless ways of thinking. That is why the Bible tells us that we must be "transformed, by the renewing of our mind *(Romans 12:2)*." The Holy Spirit is the only One who can help us break free and be healed of these deadly emotions.

Just as ailments in our physical body need to be treated with medicine to be healed, the same is true of our emotions. One powerful way to fight against depression is to
apply and confess God's Word as a healing balm to the places where you have been wounded. For instance, if you have unforgiveness in your heart, begin to confess God's verses for love and forgiveness, even if they don't exactly feel true right at the moment. If you feel worthless, confess the Scriptures of God's great love for you. A rote, mechanical repeating of words may not do much, but if you deliberately take these living words and hold on to them for dear life, you will have the enemy on the run. The devil simply cannot stand against the Word of God spoken in faith. God's Words are like spiritual antibiotics, destroying every germ and unclean thing in their path.

We need to consider the reasons why suicide is wrong and why it is not the way to avoid painful circumstances. As an act of rebellion, suicide is a sin against God. These are some of the reasons why suicide is wrong:

- **It violates the Ten Commandments.**
- Nowhere does the Bible condone a person ending life to escape circumstances.
- **Life is a gift from God.**
- Suicide is an expression of self-hatred, and the Bible says we are to "love our neighbors as ourselves."
- **Suicide usurps the power that belongs only to God.**
- A person who commits suicide short-circuits God's will for his or her life.
- **It is an expression of lack of faith.** Philippians 4:19 states, "My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."
- This applies to financial needs and emotional and physical needs.
- **Suicide is an act of selfishness.**
- It hurts the cause of Christ.
An Ethical Look At Capital Punishment

For centuries now there has been an argument between the Retentionists (term used to designate those who favor the use of the death penalty) and the Abolitionists (term used to designate those opposed to the use of the death penalty) as to the validity and the necessity of capital punishment as an effective means of punishment for crime, especially for the crime of murder. This argument is by no means settled today even though there are not many death sentences being carried out. The purpose of this paper is to try and evaluate the pros and cons of capital punishment and to try and see where the Christian should stand in relation to this issue.

Sir Winston Churchill has said, “The mood and the temper of the people with regard to the treatment of crime and criminals is one of the unfailing tests of the civilization of any country.” How true this is, whenever a country rules with much laxity and does not enforce the law with a strong hand, that country is doomed for destruction; morals and values will have no place in such a country. In Judges 17:6 we read, “In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.” During this time in the history of Israel there were no kings to rule them; there was nobody to enforce the law so man did that which he thought was right, even if it went against the law. Anytime that a country does not properly enforce the law or properly punish criminals for their crime, there will be a lack of values where man will do what he thinks or believes is right without any regard to the law.

Has our country become too lax in its punishment for murder by not instituting the death penalty or are there other and better ways of punishment for the murderer?

Punishment may be defined as the infliction of some pain, suffering, loss, or social disability as a direct consequence of some action or omission on the part of the person punished. The punishment may consist of death, physical assault, detention, loss of civil and political rights, or banishment. More specifically, capital punishment is defined as the death penalty for crime.

The Issue: Arguments For and Against Capital Punishment

To begin with there needs to be an understanding of what constitutes murder under the law. Most of the murder statues in the United States, capital and non-capital, are patterned after the Pennsylvania Statue. It is divided into three sections:

1. The acts which by their nature must be killings planned in advance, such as ‘by poison or lying in wait’.

2. The general provision against any ‘willful, deliberate, malicious, and premeditated killing’.
3. The so-called ‘felony murder provision’. It is thought that certain crimes are highly likely to result in personal injury and perhaps death, as, for example, when a man goes out aimed to rob another. Given the high probability of death, it is felt that when one intends to commit one of these acts and death does occur, no matter how accidentally, he should be held liable for murder. The technical legal explanation is that the intent to commit the original act is ‘transferred’ over to the intent to commit murder. The high probability crimes in Pennsylvania are: arson, rape, robbery, burglary and kidnapping.

Edward J. Allen writes, “It is obvious to anyone who believes in the moral and natural law that first degree murder requires personal premeditation and the full consent of the will, hence, its punishment should be meted out to the criminal or criminals personally responsible.”

There are several issues that are presented for and against the use of capital punishment for crime. They are as follows:

1. The Deterrence Issue. The Retentionists argue that most people will not commit a crime if they know they may be executed as a result; this is an outgrowth of man’s instinct for self-preservation. This is the most prominent argument for capital punishment. Capital punishment, it is asserted, is necessary to deter potential criminals. Murderers must be executed so that the lives of potential murder victims may be spared.

Two assertions are seen here: (1) that convicted murderers must be put to death in order to protect the rest of us against those individuals who might kill others if they were at large. But there are other effective means of protecting the innocent against convicted murderers—ex. Imprisonment for life in high security institutions. (2) Is needed to deter those who would otherwise commit murder. Knowledge that a crime is punishable by death will give the potential criminal pause. It rests on the assumption that capital punishment does in fact reduce the incidence of capital crimes—available data is contrary to this.

This presents sort of a deterministic view, that human actions are determined by physical and psychological conditions. It is argued that if capital punishment is the punishment of certain crimes then this will determine the action of some who would have done those crimes.

The Abolitionists would appeal to the statistics to prove that capital punishment is not a deterrence. Since 1924 Georgia has legally executed more people than any other state. Year after year it has also had the most murders per 100,000 population, a percentage persistently mounting. When five years of litigation ended in 1972 with the threat of the death penalty being definitely removed, many people predicted that Georgia’s unmatched rate of criminal homicide would rise even faster.
But look at the facts in the FBI uniform crime reports: from 1973 – 1977 the rate dropped from 17.4 per 100,000 population to 11.7 or more that 30%, moving Georgia from the worst murder record in the nation to the ninth worst.

The Retentionists would react that it is obvious that statistics cannot tell us how potential criminals may have reformed from taking another life through fear of the death penalty. As Judge Hymen of New York stated: “The death penalty is a warning, just like a light house throwing its beams out to sea. We hear about shipwrecks, but we do not hear about the ships the lighthouse guides safely on their way. We do not have proof of the number of ships it saves, but we do not tear the lighthouse down.

2. The Discrimination Issue. The Abolitionists say the death penalty has been discriminatorily applied since it is imposed more frequently on the poor, the ignorant, and minority group members than on other convicted criminals who do not fit into these categories. If capital punishment is not uniformly applied, some say, it should be abolished.

An example of this as the Abolitionists would say is, women commit about one of every seven murders; of the 3,298 people executed for murder from 1930 – 1962 only 30 were women. From 1932 – 1951, twice as many Negroes as whites were executed in the south. From 1930 – 1962, 446 people were executed under civil authority in the United States for rape; of these 45 were white, 369 Negro, and two American Indians.

The Retentionists would say that the proper approach should be to remedy the defect, not abolish the system. If prejudices do exist, which is evident; then those that are in positions to execute the death penalty should be replaced with more competent people who will do their job without this bias position.

A person could argue for a classless society as Marx wanted, then there would be no judgment made as to what class a person belonged to, whether of the upper or lower class for there would be no classes.

3. The Protection of Society Issue. Retentionists argue that only the death penalty can adequately protect society; the life sentence alternative does not provide adequate protection because criminals who are given a life sentence are often paroled and thus able to commit other crimes.

The Retentionists claim that prison personnel, and inmates as well, are put in a position of danger when the life sentence is substituted for capital punishment. Criminals under a life sentence (esp. those for who the possibility of parole is remote) are likely to kill in an attempt to escape since they know their sentences cannot be increased if the attempt fails.
4. **The Innocent Executed Issue.** One of the oldest and most popular arguments for abolition is that innocent people are convicted and may possibly be executed. Partial compensation can be given to the one convicted for a crime and given a prison sentence, but no compensation can be given to the one who is executed.

Doctors make fatal mistakes and so do politicians, but these mistakes are not good reasons for doing away with the practice of medicine or government. The abuse of marriage by unjustified divorce does not mean that the institution of marriage is not divinely established.

5. **The Retributive Issue.** If capital punishment can be justified at all it must be on the basis of the seriousness of the offense for which it is imposed. This seems to be the strongest argument in support of capital punishment, that the criminal should be dealt with not as we want but as they deserve.

Abolitionists would say, even if one is sympathetic to the claim that murderer desires to die, there are compelling reasons not to entrust the power to decide who shall die to the persons and procedures that constitute our judicial system.

The Abolitionists would say that life in prison is the safest form of punishment. Yet in most states life imprisonment simply doesn’t exist. In truth and justice the term should be discarded since it does not mean what it says. In most states life imprisonment means merely a varying number of years.

These five issues are the main issues for and against capital punishment; however, there are some closing arguments on both sides worth mentioning. The Abolitionists’ side will be considered first.

The case against the death penalty is sometimes based on the view that the justification of punishment lies in the reform which it effects. Those who break the law, it is said, are all, suffering either from psychological malfunction or from maladjustment to society. Our responsibility is to treat them of their illness, so that they become able to function in socially acceptable ways. Death, obviously, cannot reform anyone.

It is sometimes argued that capital punishment is unjustified because those guilty of crimes cannot help acting as they do; the environment, possibly interacting with inherited characteristics, causes some people to commit crimes. It is not moral culpability of choice that divides law-abiding citizens from criminals but the accident of birth or social circumstances. Eric Fromm would say that, “man’s characteristics, his thoughts, acts and personality are products of culture, starting with the interaction of child and parent in a home situation set largely by society.” Fromm believes that it is society which is sick, rather than the individuals within it.

A Retentionist in England in 1965 says, “The first function of capital punishment is to give emphatic expression to society’s peculiar abhorrence to murder… It is important
that murder should be regarded with peculiar horror… I believe that capital punishment does, in the present state of society, both express and sustain the sense of moral revulsion for murder.”

Another Retentionist writes, “I think there have been a great deal of misplaced sympathy for the murderer. But what about his victim? Nobody hears anything about the victim, though he, or she, may have been killed in cold blood. The public achieves some affinity with the murderer but none with the victim, because the victim is already dead and buried before the trial takes place. There is no word said about the orphans and widows.” It seems that everyone is so concerned about the criminal and his rights, but what about the innocent victim who was murdered in cold blood, what about his rights?

**Arguments From The Bible**

This is a much debated subject among students of the Bible. Some Christians find arguments against capital punishment in the Bible while others find arguments for it. First to be considered will be the arguments **against** capital punishment.

“Capital punishment is a blasphemous symptom of aggressive and potentially murderous hostility in our souls, not a remedial treatment of it. The gospel of redemption, love and reconciliation point to better ways”, some would say.

The abolitionist would say of the sixth commandment: the word from the Lord, especially when we read it through the lens of love, it “Do not kill any, not the weakest, nor the worst of the human family, for everyone in it is the image of God.

In 1960, the American Baptist Convention came out with this statement: “Because the Christian believes in the inherent worth of human personality and the unceasing availability of God’s mercy, forgiveness, and redemptive power, and because the Christian whole-heartedly supports the emphasis in modern penology upon the process of creative, redemptive rehabilitation rather than on punishment and primitive retribution, and because the deterrent effects of capital punishment are not supported by available evidence and because the death penalty tends to brutalize the human spirit and the society which condones it, and because human agencies of legal justice are fallible, permitting the possibility of the execution of the innocent, we therefore, recommend the abolition of capital punishment and the re-evaluation of the parole system relative to such cases.”

It is also felt that if the law of the Old Testament ought not to govern our treatment of children, then why should it govern our **penalty for murder**. In the Old Testament not only the murderer was to receive the death penalty but under the Mosaic law others were also to receive the death penalty: murder (Exodus 21:12; Numbers 35:16-31), working on the Sabbath (Exodus 35:2), cursing father or mother (Leviticus 20:9), adultery (Leviticus 20:10), incest (Leviticus 20:11-13), sodomy (Leviticus 20:15-16), false prophesying (Deuteronomy 13:1-10; 18:20), idolatry (Deuteronomy 17:2-7),
rape (Deuteronomy 22:25), keeping an ox known to be dangerous if the ox had killed a human being (Exodus 21:29), kidnapping (Exodus 21:16), incorrigible juvenile delinquency (Deuteronomy 21:18-23), and intrusion of an alien into a special place or office (Numbers 1:51; 3:10, 38; 18:7).

Capital punishment cannot be harmonized with the love of God. The Christian gospel seeks the redemption of evil-doers which is the exact opposite of all that is involved in capital punishment. Jesus, one is told, always recommended life and forgiveness over death and condemnation.

Some Christians believe that Genesis 9:6 is so general that it cannot be taken as a command to execute criminals; at most, they say, it grants permission to do so, and subsequent additions to the Word of God define the limits of the provision. This is an appeal to progressive revelation. In the Old Testament there seems to be a certain reluctance to enforce the letter of the law. Otherwise, how shall we be able to explain Israel’s failure to execute its own king, David? His murder of Uriah was premeditated and utterly cynical. Yet after David confessed this crime, Nathan told him that the Lord had taken away his sin.

There are also those who argue just as strongly for capital punishment based on certain Biblical passages. Some argue that, some crimes, especially murder, morally require the punishment of death.

The most classic passage used for capital punishment is found in Genesis 9:6 – “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man” (KJV). That this verse established the principle of capital punishment is in itself not debated. Murder is clearly to be punished by death because of the sanctity of human life. How punishment is to be carried out is stated to be ‘by man’ thus leaving some flexibility as to the actual instrumentality of punishment. That the principle extends to the entire race seems apparent from the simple fact that Noah, to whom it was given, stood at the head of a new beginning of the human race.

Another passage from the Old Testament is in Exodus 20:13, the sixth commandment: “Thou shalt not kill.” The verb used in this verse occurs 49 times in the Old Testament and in every relevant use means “to murder,” especially with premeditation. It is never used of animals, God, angels, or enemies in battle. The New Testament always translates the sixth commandment with phoneuo which is never used in any other sense than “to murder.” The penalty for breaking the commandment was death (Exodus 21:12; Numbers 35:16-21). God’s commanding Israel to kill their enemies during the conquest of Canaan could not have been a violation of this commandment either by God or by the individual soldiers who helped in battle. They were instruments of the execution of divine judgment and not violators of the sixth commandment.

In the New Testament, Ryrie comments on John 8:1-11 where the woman was caught in adultery. Several facts are clear: (1) The Lord recognized the Mosaic command to
stone adulteresses, for he invited anyone qualified in the crowd to begin the process, verse 7; (2) He himself declined to do it because He alone could exercise the prerogative of forgiving her, verse 11; and (3) If He in the process also suspended or abrogated the death penalty by His action in this case, it can be used to teach such suspension in cases of adultery only. It does not speak of murder.

One of the most classic passages for capital punishment in the New Testament is in Romans 13:1-4 – “(1) Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. (2) Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. (3) For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. (4) For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.”

Ryrie comments: (1) Human government is ordained by God (v. 1), yet it is a sphere of authority that is distinct from others like that of the home or the church; (2) Human government is to be obeyed by the Christian because it is of God, because it opposes evil (v. 4), and because our consciences tells us to obey (v. 5); (3) The government has the right of taxation (v. 6-7); and (4) The government has the right to use force (v. 4), and this, of course is the principle which impinges on our subject. The question is, what is included in its right to “bear the sword?”

As one part of the design of government is to protect the good, so the other is to punish the wicked. The existence of this delegated authority is, therefore, a reason why men should abstain from the commission of evil. “He does not bear the sword in vain,” i.e., it is not in vain that he is invested with authority to punish. The reference is not to the dagger worn by the Roman emperors as a sign of office, as mavcaira in the New Testament always means sword, which of old was the symbol of inflicting capital punishment was by decapitation with a sword, that instrument is mentioned as a symbol of the right of punishment, and as many infer from this passage, of the right of capital punishment. There are some that understand here that the sword does not mean the authority of government to practice capital punishment, but they negate that authority on the basis of phrases that proceed and follow in the context, such as “recompense to no man evil for evil,” “avenge not yourselves,” and “love worketh no ill to his neighbor.” The exegetical difficulty with doing this is simply that it fails to recognize that these exhortations are directed to the individual in relation to his responsibility to other individuals within the body of Christ, while the teaching concerning the government’s bearing the sword is in an entirely different context of group action and responsibility.

There are others that believe the sword does not include capital punishment in its representation. That it may, for instance, simply refer to a policeman’s pistol, and though it means a government official can bear arms, a court probably has no right to pass the death penalty. The Living Bible paraphrases Romans 13:4 this way: “The
policeman is sent by God to help you.” This paraphrase doesn’t seem to stick to the original. While it is true that the sword may also include other rightful restraints in the proper function of government (like fines, imprisonment, etc.), it clearly includes execution of the death penalty.

Sword denotes a large knife with bent blade, like that carried by the chiefs in the Iliad, and with which they cut the neck of the victims similar to our saber. Paul by this expression does not here denote the weapon which the emperor and his praetorian prefect carried as a sign of their power of life and death,—the application would be too restricted, but that which was worn at their side, in the provinces, by the superior magistrates, to whom belonged the right of capital punishment, and which they caused to be borne solemnly before them in public processions. By the sword—this was apparently the usual mode of inflicting the death penalty upon murders, especially when apprehended by the nearest male relative of his victim, who had the responsibility of killing him on sight (Numbers 35:19, 27). It was certainly the mode used in putting to death the population of a community which had fallen to idolatry (Deuteronomy 13:15); it was first practiced in the case of the apostasy of the golden calf (Exodus 32:27), where large numbers of offenders were involved.

John Calvin writes, “part of the function of magistrates is their duty to repress by force the insolent behavior of the wicked, who do not willingly allow themselves to be governed by laws, and to inflict punishment on their offences as God’s judgment requires. Paul explicitly declares that magistrates are armed with the sword not just for empty show, but in order to smite evildoers. An avenger of wrath means one who executes God’s wrath. Paul proves this from the use of the sword, which the Lord has delivered into his hand. This is a note-worthy passage for proving the right of the sword. If by arming the magistrates the Lord has also committed to him the use of the sword, then whenever he punishes the guilty by death, he is obeying God’s commands by exercising this vengeance. Those, therefore, who consider that it is wrong to she the blood of the guilty are against God.”

One could use the ethics of Emile Brunner to argue for capital punishment. For Brunner, justice is separate from love. In justice we give the other person his due. The person gets what he or she deserves, based on a sober, rational, and realistic appraisal of the facts of the case. It does not regard the person but sees only what is right. As Brunner says, “The just man recognizes in the other the same dignity which he finds in himself, the same quality as a person, the same general law of being…justice is never concerned with the human being as such, but only with the human being in relationships. Justice belongs to the world of systems, not to the world of persons.” One could argue that a government which fails to execute the death penalty in order to practice charity cannot appeal to love in exculpation; love of that kind would be sheer sentimentality. It is always the responsibility of love to see that justice is done, and then the real work of love actually begins.
Conclusion

After carefully researching all of the main arguments for and against capital punishment, there is still some confusion as to where exactly the Christian should stand in regard to capital punishment. The stand that a Christian takes will have to be based on the evaluation of the arguments presented and on each one’s interpretation of the Scriptures as they are given.

Donald Cole sums it up this way, “the Bible does not seem to demand the death penalty; it permits it. The force of many passages is that it recommends it for those who shed innocent blood. Mike Royko speaks biblically when he calls for the execution of “cold-blooded, remorseless, sadistic people who kill for profit (or) pleasure…who have a choice and choose to kill’ who can deny that action against the many murderers walking our streets is long overdue.” He goes on to say, “however, only a moral society is fit to exercise the power of taking a life for a life, for only a moral society is capable of assessing guilt properly. In my judgment, our own society is nearly incapable of exercising this awesome power in the spirit which is required-as those who are truly appalled by murder and believe that murderers should be handed over to God. Here the national moral fiber is so weakened that we are outraged only by crimes that inconvenience us personally. Hence, the solution to the problem of law and order is an outpouring of the Holy Spirit of God as mighty and far-reaching as that in Wesley’s times. Until such an event, history reveals that nations that keep the hangman busy are not infrequently governed by scoundrels who should themselves be hanged.”

It is my belief that cold-blooded, malicious murder should be punished by death. I believe that this is the only crime that should carry the death penalty. It is my conviction that Romans 13:4 does give the government the opportunity to execute the death penalty. Even though our society is not as moral as we would like it, when Paul wrote this to the Romans neither was their society all Christian, yet Paul still obligated this authority to the government. If the government is corrupt then we as Christians should do what we can to rid our government of this corruption. Such people like Gary Gilmore, who was executed on January 7, 1977 for malicious murder, do indeed deserve to receive the death penalty.

I am aware that the bible pictures God as love and that the greatest act of love He bestowed on man was when He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to die for our sins. The Scriptures assert that Jesus died for us as individuals and that we can receive forgiveness of our sins, no matter how gross or immoral they may be. I do not know if there have been any studies which would indicate how many of those who have committed murder have actually asked God for forgiveness of their sin or murder before their execution. Reforms are good if they help people live better in society but reform is not enough. What is needed is the transformation which comes only through a personal encounter with Jesus Christ and then if this takes place, I do believe that the sentence of the condemned should be reviewed again. Yet the Scriptures also reveal God as a judge. The Scriptures assert that one day God will
pour out His wrath on all sin. I do believe in a literal hell, a place of torment where those that have not had their sins washed in the blood of Jesus will go. Romans 1:18 states: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness an unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness” (KJV). Concerning murder, in 1 John 3:15b it reads: “Ye know that no murder hath eternal life abiding in him” (KJV).

Finally, while I believe we as Christians should demonstrate the wrath and judgment of god against such a sin as cold-blooded murder; I do not believe that justice can be separated from love as Emile Brunner would say, but I believe justice can be administered with love, even if that justice requires the death penalty.

4 Things That Will Help You Determine Right From Wrong

These principles are found in 1 Corinthians 6, 8, and 10:

1. **Is it helpful?** “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any” (1 Corinthians 6:12). On the basis of that verse, I can ask myself: Is it helpful? Is whatever I’m about to do helpful to me physically, or will it harm me? Does it help me mentally, or does it tend to get my mind on things that draw me into sin? Does it help me spiritually? Does it help me grow, or does it hurt my spiritual development?

2. **Does it get me in its power?** Does it enslave me? We can conclude from that verse (6:12) that anything that gets me in its grip—that becomes a habit I cannot break—I should leave alone. Paul said, “I will not be brought under the power of any[thing].”

3. **Will it cause others to stumble?** But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble” (1 Corinthians 8:12-13). Will my doing this cause others to stumble? Maybe I can handle it, but will it affect others who see me doing it? Will it cause them problems? Will my actions lead them into trouble? What I do is seen and sometimes copied by others. And I am the only example of a Christian that somebody has. So I must think of others when I decide on my activities.

4. **Is it glorifying to God?** “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). Does this contemplated action glorify God? You and I are to live our lives to the praise of His glory. So I must ask myself: Can I do this to the glory of God?
Introduction To Ministerial Ethics

Part II

The Christian Ministry

Being a minister or just being a leader carries with it a high standard. There are several principles that we want to consider as we consider the conduct of the minister/leader. The ministers/leaders conduct should be based on these principles:

1. The minister must keep the nobility of his calling uppermost in his own mind. Should he fail to do this, he had better take up some other form of work. If for any cause he begins to look down upon his calling, or to feel that for him its glory has departed, he is lost. The temptation may come to him, for instance, to measure the ministry by some of the standards which apply to the work of other professions—by temporal influence, by cultural values, by that omnipresent measure of all things in our day and time, money. But should he attempt to use any of these things as a measure for his work, failure will come to him. The Christian ministry can no more be measured by these values than time can be measured by the mile or space by the pound. The professional standards of the ministry/leader belong to another category, a spiritual one. Any effort to force a comparison with other professions will fail.

2. The minister must hold high in outward acts the established reputation of the Christian ministry. Every minister should weigh very carefully his own thought and intent against the practice of the ages. Just as no reputable lawyer ever breaks the traditions of his ancient and honorable calling, just as no physician departs from but holds in the highest respect his own professional ethics and methods, so the ministry should preserve and guard those traits which by a common consent belong to the highest type of ministerial service.

Perhaps ministers should have some such custom as prevails among army officers. There is a charge for which military and naval officers are sometimes court-martialed known as “conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman.” There are also acts which are unbecoming a minister as well as those unbecoming a gentleman.

Conduct unbecoming a gentleman is always conduct unbecoming a minister, but conduct sometimes not unbecoming in other gentlemen may be unbecoming in the minister. Henry Wilder Foote, in his The Minister and His Parish, observed that the community expects a closer adherence to moral standards on the part of the minister than from the ordinary man; that there are “courses of conduct which, while all right
for others, are unbecoming in him.” A minister may reject this thought. He may affirm that he has a perfect right to do what any other Christian has the right to do—and theoretically he has. Practically, however, he is going to find, as Lloyd C. Douglas expressed it, that the people will make a priest out of him whether he likes it or not.

3. The minister must never forget that he is one who serves. He occupies a position in the local church and congregation which puts him upon a pedestal in the minds of the people. Everything serves to dramatize the centrality of his place a pastor, preacher and executive. His opinions in the official church meetings are quite often listened to by able businessmen as though an oracle were pronouncing, and his least wish is sometimes regarded as something divinely ordered. It is easy if you aren’t careful to think more highly of yourself than you should. Every minister is to lead; but his leadership should be tempered with a deep-seated awareness of his own fallibility, and he should never forget what manner of man he is. Every minister should be on guard against “pre-eminence setting in.”

4. The minister must for reasons of personal safety desert his parish and people when some great, universal danger impends. This refers to such things as a hostile invasion, a virulent epidemic, or natural disaster. This situation seldom arises but the unanimous voice of the ministers of all the ages has declared that the pastor may not leave his people and fly to safety when the people themselves are in some epochal danger. His own family he may send to safety or protect when he can, but for himself there must be faithfulness unto death. It is in times of natural disaster, floods, epidemics, earthquakes, bloodshed, that the pastor may prove a tower of strength to his flock.

When some large building enterprise or heavy financial plan has been undertaken (especially at the request of the pastor), or when a fire or other disaster has struck heavily at a congregation’s resources, no pastor should at such a time pack up and take a pulpit elsewhere. A pastor should not leave a church, or accept a call to another pulpit, as long as the church he is serving is in difficulties. No minister worthy of the name, after persuading his parishioners to undertake some heavy financial burden or leading them to commit themselves to some momentous plan, would immediately feel free to leave these parishioners immediately upon receiving a call to greener—and less burdensome—pastures.

5. The minister must utilize his time properly. Like other professions, the ministry is not a matter of eight working hours with pay-and—a–half for overtime, but of life service. The minister therefore gives himself completely to his profession.

6. The minister must never measure his work by the salary involved. With the Christian ministry it is the work and not the wages which must be supreme.

As a consequence it should be said that just as the minister should not measure his own services in terms of money, neither should he so measure that of any brother
minister. The “grading” of ministers by the size of their respective salaries is a degrading of the whole profession.

7. **The minister must guard the use of his name.** He should not give the sanction of his endorsement to those causes or movements of which he cannot be sure. The minister should make it a rule never to give his name to any organization or movement to which he cannot at the same time give himself and, within limits, his attention. This will force him to know what he is getting into, and will give him a chance to have an actual voice in the project.

8. **The minister must not lower his profession by becoming a “handy man” for all the members of his church.** One pastor was kind enough to assist certain families a few times with the use of his automobile. It soon became the usual thing for the people to call for him whenever someone had to be taken to the hospital in the near-by city, or to visit the dentist there. Sometimes he was telephoned and asked to meet some member of one of the families of the church coming in on a night train, and it was explained that the family found it “inconvenient” to be there. Where there is need, of course, work must be done, no matter how menial; but the people should learn that there is a higher duty given to the minister than to act as errand boy for the community.
The Minister As A Man

A remarkable characteristic distinguishes the Christian ministry from every other profession. This characteristic was perhaps best stated in an address given by President Woodrow Wilson to a band of Christian workers and ministers in New York upon one occasion. The President, declaring the thought and teaching of his own father along this line, said that the Christian minister must be something before he can do anything. That is, his character and person are greater than his work—or rather, his work depends on his personal character. This is not true of other professions. It does not matter, for instance, what sort of character a lawyer may have; the jury looks at the facts and the evidence he brings out in each particular case. It does not matter what sort of man a doctor is if he is a “good doctor.” But the minister as a person stands above his work, his sermon, his all. His preaching is measured by what the people know of the man; his work is tested by the character he shows. He may have the tongue of a Demosthenes and the executive ability of a Judge; but if he is not personally known to be a good servant of Jesus Christ, neither oratory nor ability will avail.

Because the people know the man, they listen to the preacher; because they see him as a neighbor, they respect him as pastor. What he does speaks louder than what he says.

The man therefore, who is the minister, has certain duties to himself and to his person.

1. Physical life

A prime duty for every person is proper care of the body. The minister will preach only as long as his physical body is a functioning organism in this world. He will preach well, or serve well, only when his body, the physical nexus of his soul and the universe, functions well. Too many ignore the whole physical basis of life and reap as a result collapse in middle life, or are handicapped for their remaining years by some personal disability.

A certain time for rest and recreation in connection with the ordinary routine of ministerial life and labor ought to be set aside deliberately—such is the prevailing opinion among ministers. At least one day a week should be used for his own relaxation and rest, as other professional men and women and other workers should also do. Sunday is the preacher’s working day; therefore some other day must be his/her day of rest.

One positive affirmation can be made about ministerial recreation: it should be entirely unlike the routine work of the week or it will not serve as recreation.
An *annual vacation period* is a necessity for the minister as well as for all other persons. This view was not held by the ministry as a whole 75 or so years ago, some of whom argued that the devil never took a holiday so why should they? But it should be noticed that vacation time is not an attempt to flee duty, but to be all the more ready for duty.

2. **Mental life**

An essential ministerial duty is the *cultivation of the mind* and the corresponding improvement of professional and spiritual powers by application and study. Long ago William G. T. Shedd said that the holiest men have been the most studious.

The artist has a “studio,” the businessman an “office”; the preacher should have a *study*.

*Time* and *system* must regulate ministerial habits of study as well as everything else. The morning hours are voted by most as the best for study.

A large number of ministers state that they prefer night hours as their time for professional study, though with others this period is mentioned as the occasion when they engage in general or nonprofessional reading. General reading is of professional help, in that it keeps a man/woman in touch with the thought of the day and with the thinking of their people.

A minister needs to have a good library.

3. **Spiritual life and duty**

Absolutely primary to his/her calling and work is a minister’s personal duty to cultivate his own spiritual life. There is a danger here. In the Song of Solomon chapter 1 verse 6 it says: *“They made me the keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept.”*

A man’s very familiarity with sacred things may breed, not contempt, but spiritual obtuseness. The bible becomes a quarry out of which to dig texts, not a reservoir for personal spiritual refreshment; prayer is something done for others, not for oneself; the lives of the saints, the rich devotional writings of great authors become sermonic material with which to stir others, and we become—God forgive us—professional. The quiet hour, prayer, the rigid discipline which we should like to see carried on by others should be undertaken by the minister himself if he is to be the man god would have him be.

No one can fulfill his ministry unless he keeps the fountains of his own spiritual life springing up afresh each day.

4. **Duties to home and family**
Foremost among the duties of a minister are those he owes to his home and family. The pastor has a hard task, but the pastor’s family often has a harder. A minister’s relationship to his family is as high and as sacred as that to his church.

If the minister’s home is to be what it ought to be the minister must take time for his family. He must not leave all of this responsibility to his wife. Being the head of the home, he has a definite responsibility to guide it in the right way. The pastor must not be so busy with the affairs of his church that he becomes a mere boarder in his own home, almost a stranger to his children!

The better the father, the better the pastor; the better the guide for the children of others, the better the guide for one’s own children.

The minister owes it to his family to make a living for them. There are many pastorates and many church members, but only one home. Neither the minister nor his family measures life in terms of the monthly paycheck signed by the church treasurer; but no father, minister or otherwise, can forget those who look to him for daily bread.

While a minister may not be able to give his family wealth or luxury, yet he can and should labor to make a comfortable, happy home for his children.

The family of the minister should not be made to serve as slaves of the church, nor should their home be used as a public convenience for the entire membership. The minister’s family, like any other in the congregation, ought to take an active part in the work of the church and its several departments. However, to force the wife into the position of assistant pastor and the children into becoming prodigies of childish ecclesiastical leadership is wrong. It is not fair to the family and it spoils the church.

All things being equal, the family of the minister should have the same rights and privileges, duties and obligations that belong to other Christian families.

One thing about the wife—no matter what role the congregation expects her to play, the minister very properly should see his wife as his wife, to love and to cherish, to protect and to support. He must not forget that she married him, not a whole congregation.

5. **Personal finances**

There is one inflexible duty that the minister owes to himself, to his family, to his profession, and to his church—he must be absolutely exact on money matters. “Financial looseness or irregularity cannot be tolerated,” Washington Gladden observed long ago. All the preaching a man may do will not atone for unpaid bills.
Relations With Brother Ministers

There is a suggestive value, a guiding value, in the attitudes and pronouncements of the ministerial brotherhood itself; and nowhere is this stronger than at those points where ministers measure and evaluate the propriety of their conduct toward each other.

1. Duty to predecessor

Always there is a predecessor, and always his successor owes much to him. In a notable address “ministerial ethics” Bishop Charles B. Galloway said:

Much of our work is to reap where others have sown. Their sowing should have equal honor with our reaping. A circuit, station, or district may be served the full term without the earnest pastor’s noting much fruit of his labor. Another comes whose mission is to gather the golden sheaves and whose joy it is to sing the harvest song. Though possibly much honored, credited with being a more successful workman, he really enjoys the fruit of another’s planting. …The apostle Paul said: Now he that planteth and watereth are one.”

Most ministers agree that the best plan of work when one first comes into a church is to study the predecessor’s methods and plans and continue them as best one can. In the beginning there should be no radical break with his methods.

The new minister needs all the popularity he can gather the first few weeks. It will do no good, but actual harm, to inaugurate at once sweeping changes in order to let the people know that a new hand is at the helm. In a few weeks, when conditions are better known, when the “well-formed” plans are known from the “ill-formed” which belonged to the former regime, the new pastor can then get into his own stride and guide his people into the best of everything.

Every pastor will find, on entering a new church, that he must deal with his predecessor’s special friends. There are some people in every pastorate who will never feel toward a present pastor as kindly as they do to a certain former one. They hold him in memory as the best minister their church ever had. They will speak of his excellencies to each succeeding pastor and sigh with regret at his passing from their midst. They may be polite enough to add as an afterthought that of course they like their present pastor also—but that same present pastor well knows that he will never take the beloved predecessor’s place in the hearts of certain individuals. It is well to be very kindly and sympathetic with these, and to remember the lover’s advice and “praise a rival.” Never for one moment should a minister permit himself to be irked by the ceaseless praise of a former pastor as it is dinned in his ears by devoted friends. Depreciation of a predecessor’s efficiency ought to be as rare as it is reprehensible.
Every minister discovers some persons who dislike the former pastor. As Galloway says:

Every man of positive convictions will have had some antagonisms. His style was not according to every taste. Some oversensitive ones felt themselves slighted. On his first pastoral round a preacher will discover that his predecessor had a blade that cut and a twanging bow that sent an arrow to the mark. He will hear criticisms favorable and unfavorable. Then and there he has an opportunity to display the true chivalrous brotherhood of the ministry...He should remember...the very persons who discuss so freely his predecessor will give him a similar introduction to his successor.

Under no circumstances should he let them hear a single word to the discredit of his predecessor.

If the contingency arises in which the visits of a predecessor are not casual or disinterested, trouble may be made. There is nothing that worries a minister more than for a former pastor to meddle with the affairs of his pastorate. This is a breach of etiquette on the part of the predecessor, of course, but from the point of view of the local pastor what is the proper course to take? The best method is to attempt to find out what motive actuates the interfering brother. If it is earnest though ill-considered interest, it will not be hard to show him that his letters or his visits are not best for the work. If it is a natural desire or inclination to meddle and if all hints fail, then it may be necessary for the pastor to be perfectly frank with the interferer and let him know in plain words that he is no longer in charge, and that his visits are not welcomed.

2. Duty to a successor

When a new minister comes to a church taking up duties and obligations with which he is not at all familiar, he instinctively turns to the man who can advise and help him more than any other—the outgoing pastor. The rocks that line the ministerial channel are known to him, but not to his successor. It should be the prime duty of every outgoing pastor, to a certain extent, to meet with and advise the new man of local conditions.

When leaving a church if you are man or upset don’t take it out on the incoming pastor.

The outgoing pastor should be ready to give a broad survey of the field and its work. Every minister feels himself obligated to supply all this and other helpful information to his successor, but at the same time he should be on guard lest he seem to be directing future work. One may well advise and state methods previously followed, but the minister of tact will know how to make it clear that the situation is not entirely in the hands of the new man.

It is not wise for the outgoing minister to tell the new man everything he may know concerning the people of the church. If there are hidden rocks in the channel, the new pilot should be apprised of them; but there are dark, unfathomed caves in the pastoral deep, which, discovered accidentally by one pastor, need never be known to another.
What a new minister does not know does not always hurt him. Let every man find out some things for himself.

When a retiring minister finds himself in the position of a discredited or rejected man, he should be Christianly disposed toward his successor. Just as every child deserves the right to be wellborn, so every minister deserves the right to a good start in any new field he may enter.

It is usually conceded that in general it is better for a retiring minister to leave both church and area before the new man comes to take charge. A former pastor’s presence should not be allowed to serve as the nucleus for the crystallizing regret of his many friends. It is also best for the outgoing man to dodge the opening reception if there be one. The king is dead—let him stay dead (or out of sight). Long live the king!

Church property, church records, especially the house which is to be occupied by the new minister, should all be turned over to him in good condition.

When a man leaves a church, let him leave it. No minister should be constantly going back to gossip with the brethren or hear comments on the work of his successor.

If a former pastor has been asked to come back for a wedding etc. he should communicate with the people who asked to be sure they have talked to the present pastor about this and that he is agreeable with this. They should also try to have the present pastor involved in the service in some way. This will avoid a lot of confusion and hurt feelings.

3. Invitations to other churches

When a minister is invited by a group or society of another church to bring some message upon a public occasion, or perhaps to occupy the pulpit in the absence of the pastor, he should always make sure that the invitation is known and approved by the preacher in charge. Some church organizations take it upon themselves to form their own programs without respect to the minister of the church. When an outside minister receives an invitation from such an organization, he ought, before accepting, to make sure that the minister of the church to be visited is informed of his coming.

4. New and visiting ministers

When a person moves into a new community immemorial custom demands that the first visit should be made by the local people. This is a courtesy that every pastor should remember with regard to “new ministers” who move in to take over the pastorate of a sister denomination, or any visiting minister whose presence touches the life of the local people. Such visitors and new pastors have the right to expect this courtesy from the local ministry.
Pastors indeed are busy, but should not be too preoccupied with their own work to greet a brother hospitably as he begins his.

5. Duty to ministers of other denominations

Hopefully interchurch rivalry has died down with the passing years, and the stern denominationalism of an earlier age has all but disappeared. Nevertheless between local churches, especially in small towns, there is considerable counting of noses, comparing of local efforts, and striving for local prestige. “In a Competitive Pulpit” was the succinct title of an article by Walter Dudley Cavert which appeared in the religious press many years ago. This article pointed out and deprecated the fact that often ministers are in competition with each other rather than with the evil they all should fight.

He [the minister] is hired to produce visible tangible results for his particular congregation and often he cannot strengthen his own organization without detracting from the possibilities of the sister church across the road…The minister is in a position hardly different from that of the business man who finds it impossible to increase his own trade without taking customers away from his rival on the opposite corner. He is always under the temptation of thinking in terms of his own personal advantage.

[Christian Century, July 12, 1939]

Unlovely rivalry and professional jealousy are indeed abominable, but there is sometimes a healthy provoking of one another to good works. Every Christian minister has a right to reach out and gather all he can for his Master without interfering in any way with the garnering done by his brother.

Proselyting the members of other churches is universally condemned by ministers of all denominations. As Galloway put it: “Our field is the world and not some other church; and our mission is to feed, not steal sheep.”

Occasionally, however, a member of one church seeks of his own volition to join another. He may have married a member of the church he desires to join; he may feel more at home there; he may have taken a dislike to his won pastor and wishes to injure him seriously by leaving his pastoral care. At any rate he comes and asked to be allowed to join the other fellowship. It is not ethical to receive a member of another church without informing his previous pastor of the action contemplated.

Ministers will do well to learn just why the new member wishes to come in. “Spite members,” like spite marriages, do not last.

Every minister will at times have occasion to visit in the homes of the members of other denominations—sometimes social calls, sometimes business, sometimes sympathetic, as, for instance, after a death. The earnest, straightforward minister never offends nor attempts to usurp a rightful pastor’s place. His brother ministers have him sized up after a brief observation of his work. They allow him a great many liberties with their people when he earns their confidence, but if he is a “sheep stealer” the gates of brotherhood are soon barred against him.
6. **Duty to visiting ministers**

When visiting ministers come to a church, the pastor should not always feel obligated to ask them to preach. So doing might interfere with the program, which has been announced. Many churches constantly have visiting ministers in attendance. If the pastor always gave way to them, he would not be able to carry out a constructive program. A simple recognition of the visiting minister is sufficient, or the pastor may want to use the visiting brother in some way in the service, asking him to read the Scriptures or lead in prayer.
The Pastoral Ministry

Let me begin by asking you two questions: (1) How important do you feel pastoral visits are in the home of members in the 21st century? (2) How often should a pastor visit the members of his church?

Pastoral Visiting

To a certain extent the old-fashioned type of pastoral call has been discarded. Were pastoral work and preaching the only obligations resting upon a minister he might very well give himself completely to these two duties. But the multiplicity of other tasks falling upon him has cut heavily into the time he might otherwise give to visiting. It is well for the pastor to remember that his presence in an individual’s home brings him in far more intimate contact with the people who live there than any amount of letter writing or committee work can do.

Many pastors state that they hold general systematic visitation as an ideal, but that emergencies in the membership, sick calls, and visits to new people consume most of the time they can allot to visiting. The size of the congregation is a determining factor. Priority in all pastoral calling is, of course, given to the sick and bereaved, with visits of welcome to new people taking second place. The aged and shut-ins are also on the preferred list.

On the credit side it should be remembered that pastoral visiting, in addition to its value to people and church, is vastly helpful to the pastor himself. Going in and out of the homes of his people takes time that might be given to reading and study, but it opens before him a very real book of life. By some indirect but powerful alchemy the things a minister learns in visiting his people—conversational chitchat, personal aspirations, trivial home happenings—become transmuted into sermonic material that can bless and help. Something is always added to a man’s preaching when his pastoral visiting is steady and regular, and something vital goes from it when he ceases to visit. A house going preacher not only makes a churchgoing people, but the man himself is enabled to gear his messages to his people’s needs.

In regards to the issue of partiality, a pastor should avoid making a difference in the way he greets people at the door of his church, or when visitors, friends, or new people are passing by him. He should not show greater pleasure at meeting one than another, but sometimes he obviously dismisses one with detached impersonality only to greet the next with warmth and enthusiasm. People are much more sensitive at this point than is sometimes realized.

The minister should remember that he is pastor of all his people. He should avoid the display of preferences and the cultivation of intimacies within the church which may be construed as evidence of partiality. He should not attach himself to any social set either in the church or in the community. He should not allow personal feelings to interfere with the impartial nature of his ministrations.
Should the pastor have prayer with each visit? It depends. A few ministers state that their invariable rule is to have prayer regardless of circumstances, but the majority report that they leave this to the moment itself. Prayer, however, even with a single individual and in the midst of daily life, has a spiritual value all its own.

**Relationships With Women**

Women make up a large proportion of the minister’s flock, and the pastoral relationship with them is complicated by the fact that they are women.

Ministers must visit women quite often in a pastoral capacity. The man who thinks he can get out of this is much mistaken. He will find young women and old women among his membership—sick and well, rich and poor, great and small. Even if he confines his visits to the sick alone, he will find that a large proportion of these will be women. This fact had better be understood beforehand by himself, his wife, and his people.

Whatever member needs the pastor should receive his attention, regardless of sex or any other condition. Most ministers would much prefer to work with men, but this may not always be done. The ideal minister will hold all his people equal in his heart. There is neither male nor female, bond nor free, Greek nor barbarian in the kingdom of which he is made a minister.

The danger in ministerial service to women is not so much error on the minister’s part—though there are doubtless silly women in church as well as out, and there are weak brethren—but the causing of comment and gossip, which would embarrass the minister’s service. The merest nothing will start a scandal, and the sensible minister knows it and acts accordingly.

Henry Wilder Foote advised that visits alone upon young married women in the absence of the husband should be avoided. He also suggested that some other person should be taken along, and this is a sensible procedure when calling upon a woman whose character is known to be doubtful. Repeated calls upon any one woman should be avoided, since these will give rise to talk. Anything that will cause gossip should be shunned.

Personal familiarity with women must be utterly taboo. “A minister, especially a young one, who puts his hands, however innocent-mindedly, on the person of womankind, particularly young girls, is in the mildest language I can command an unmitigated fool,” wrote Dr. Barstow.

One of the best ways in the world to keep from falling into sin on the woman problem is to stay warmly and fervently in love with your wife. In spite of all the heavy duties and rigorous routine, make sure that you take time to share your wife’s affection. This can well be the biggest safeguard you will have against temptation and sin along this line.
How To Conduct yourself When Visiting The Sick

Visitation of the sick is universally conceded to be a prime pastoral duty and one, which yields a rich harvest to the pastor conscientiously engaging in it. Nowhere does the minister find himself more welcome or his coming more eagerly awaited than in the sickroom. “The sick are always in,” Dr. Clausen put it; and after a time they begin to wonder why their pastor does not hurry around to see them. A good doctor brings calmness and a sense of security by his very presence and so should the representative of the Great Physician.

Do not stay long with the sick.

In the little book *The Pastor’s Pocket Manual for Hospital and Sickroom*, by Edmond Holt Babbitt, there is a list of “ten harmful things” which the minister should guard against when visiting the sick:

- Never ask a patient what his sickness is.
- Never sit or lean on the patient’s bed. Avoid jarring the bed.
- Do not set the patient against the physician or hospital. If there is inefficiency or injustice, go to the proper authorities.
- Do not make hospital calls when you are sick.
- Give no information about the diagnosis even if you know it. It is not your business to tell the patient how sick he is or is not. Information about him will be given the patient by his physician.
- Carrying information about patients from room to room belittles your profession.
- Avoid carrying worries, problems, friction, tension, and crises into the sickroom.
- Never enter a patient’s room when the door is closed without permission from the nurse on duty. Knock on the door.
- Never argue with a patient. The purpose of an argument is to win over one’s opponent; not to give light. If you disagree, then just disagree, and let it go at that.
- Do not ask a new mother if she got what she wanted. It is important that she want what she got.

It is to be remembered when visiting the sick that the patient is the center of the stage. One is often tempted to talk to others who may be present, as this is easier to do; but the sick, like the aged, are hungry for personal attention and should be made to feel that they are more important than anyone else in the room.

In regard to prayer in the sickroom the particular situation in each instance will be the guide. This is the rule which a large number of present-day ministers say they follow. However, a considerable percentage state that they always have prayer with the sick. All sickroom prayers should be short.
Of course there are prayers and prayers. Some prayers for the sick were better unsaid—that is, before the sick themselves. For example, one good minister visited an ole friend who was ill and, before leaving, prayed for him. He informed the Lord in mournful tones that both of them were men living on “borrowed time,” that their short and evil days in this vale of tears were fast drawing to an end. The result was much depression for the sick man and much wrath on the part of relatives who had spent weeks of steady cheerful effort to persuade the invalid that he would soon be well. If a postscript were added to this story, it would be to the effect that the relatives in question saw to it that the dear ministerial brother never again got a chance to pray with his ole friend. A Christian prayer ought to reflect faith and hope or there is something wrong with the pray-er.

Usually the minister is permitted some latitude as to hours of visiting, but he should let this permission come from the proper authorities and not take it for granted.

When a person is known to be dying the pastor should be with him all the time possible. The conversation should be such as becomes Christian people when faced with life’s ultimate test. Let faith be strengthened, let hope be in the atmosphere and trust in the prayer. It does not always pay to talk of death except in extremis or at the insistent will of the dying. Prayer with the dying is a very delicate ordeal and no rules can be made for it, but many ministers feel better satisfied when they have made a commendatory prayer over the departing.

Next to the sick the aged have a special hold on the pastor. We need do no more than mention this fact, but let it be emphasized here that attention is what old people want. They wish to be noticed; they wish to be made to feel that they still are part of the world. Some pastors remember their aged members with cards or with occasional remembrances as well as short calls, and such pastors reap a hundredfold. It is not impossible that when our Lord shall call to mind the sick who were visited, the naked who were clothed, the hungry who were fed, he may also add: “I was aged, and ye noticed me; old and infirm, and ye paid attention unto me.” Old people, too, are among “the least of these.”

Comforting The Bereaved

When death comes to a member or a close relative of a member, good pastors go at once to the home affected. Death serves as the “you will report at once” order that was so familiar in the army days.

A funeral is a cataclysmic event in any home, and although it may be arranged at an inconvenient hour the pastor had best leave all other duties and give his generous service to those who need it most.

After the funeral the comfort of the pastor’s presence is even more necessary than before. Let him go back as soon as possible—the next day, many ministers advise.
The minister’s sympathetic attitude means more than words can tell. His visits may be repeated at longer and longer intervals, until Time, the great healer, does his work.

**In Relation To The Congregation**

In his preaching and teaching the pastor should always be true to his convictions, but he should learn to do it in a loving spirit. I believe it was G. Campbell Morgan who said there was only one man whom he cared to hear preach on the subject of Hell, and that man was Dwight L. Moody. The reason given was that when Moody preached on this subject he did it with tears in his eyes. He spoke out his deep convictions in love. Too many ministers lack the compassion of Christ as they present their convictions. There is a harshness, a coldness, a sternness that needs to be melted by the love of Christ.

The pastor should avoid scolding from the pulpit those who are present in the congregation for the absence or deficiencies of those who are not present. This is not fair to those who are present and it has no effect on those who are absent. More than this, the scolding is likely to cast a gloom over the entire service, detracting from the spirit of worship, and reacting unfavorably upon the pastor’s own spirit. He may feel very keenly the lack of loyalty on the part of certain members of his flock. He may be much disappointed in their conduct. But he had better forget it while directing his public services. If rebuke is necessary, let him do it in private or when the deserving folk are present.

The pastor should not take advantage of those who have wronged him by whipping them from the pulpit. Such action takes unfair advantage of those who are the objects of his anger, for they have no equal opportunity to present their side of the affair. The action is therefore cowardly and unworthy of the man of God. Let him remember the example of his Lord, of whom it was said, “He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth” (Isaiah 42:2-3).

The minister will do well to beware of putting himself under obligation to certain members of his congregation by obtaining financial loans or accepting special favors from them. Such a practice can easily place the pastor in an embarrassing situation. For example, if those from whom special favors have been received should be involved in wrongdoing, the pastor might be tempted to soft-pedal the situation. Or the pastor may find himself hampered in his preaching because he doesn’t wish to offend those to whom he is obligated. If the pastor is not obligated to anyone in the congregation, he can view all his members with equality and can preach to their needs without any partiality.
Surviving A Visible Mistake

I wish that there were some wonderful place
Called the Land of Beginning Again,
Where all our mistakes and all our heartaches,
And all of our poor selfish grief
Could be dropped like a shabby old coat at the door
And never put on again.

Louise Fletcher Tarkington,
“The Land of Beginning Again”

2 Samuel 11:16-26; Psalm 51:4, 12-14

No great life has ever been lived without pain.

David’s survival of his affair with Bathsheba shows that great leaders can indeed transcend their mistakes. I believe survival is best achieved when three factors enter into play: openness, forgiveness of others, and a recognition that we are all in the process of maturing.

Openness is an imperative quality in a leader’s life. Those who can live in openness best survive their mistakes. Crises such as Watergate make it clear that all of us are more tolerant of admitted mistakes than false denials. In King David’s case, he did for a while try to cover up his affair. His murder of Uriah and his duplicity with Nathan the prophet could not long be hidden. What is admirable is that once he was discovered, David openly declared that he was not above reproach. Kings can be guilty of sin. Psalm 51 is a public acknowledgment of David’s need for repentance.

The second quality a leader must cultivate is a spirit of forgiveness. All sin from time to time. The story of David illustrates that it is good for us to forgive others just in case we someday need them to return the favor.

Forgiving others is not just medicine you give them; forgiveness is the tonic you take yourself. If you do not drink deeply of the forgiveness you extend, your grudges will in time poison your soul. Your leadership will be crippled at last by a narrow, stingy humanity. Eugene Habedker advises us: “A leader who has not learned to be a good forgiver will not be as effective as one who has. Leadership affords too many uncomfortable incidents, too many inaccurate accusations, and too little time to keep track of everyone who has ‘wronged’ you.” Jesus said, “In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you” (Matthew 7:12, NIV). A follower you treat with charity is far more prone to forgive you when you yourself are caught in a storm of contempt.

Jesus told a parable about a steward who was forgiven a great debt. However, in the wake of his forgiveness he became hard and unforgiving. To demand, “Pay back
“what you owe me!” (Matthew 18:28, NIV) is hardly defensible after a great debt has been forgiven. In His model prayer, Jesus taught us to pray, “Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Matthew 6:12, NIV). Such a prayer lies at the heart of surviving a mistake. If your followers see your charity in a moment of their great need, they will softly lay aside a gift of mercy for your future need.

There is one final quality you should develop to save your future with forgiveness. You must communicate to people that you are a fallible human being. Like all the world around you, you are a person in process. Process people are much easier to forgive when they are caught in error than those who try to project that they are perfectly finished and full of wisdom.

You can establish the idea that you are a person in process by doing a few very simple things. Let others see you goof up. Let those around you see you change your mind from time to time. Let others see you do things differently than you did yesterday. One of Gandhi’s disciples once confronted him in desperation: “Gandhi, I don’t understand you. How can you say one thing last week, and something quite different this week?”

“Oh,” Gandhi replied, “because I have learned something since last week.”

David lived with his best warriors for a long time. David’s close proximity to his men may have allowed them to see him as a person in process. In his close living with these men he had avoided a cold, professional remoteness. Doubtlessly David had a forgiving spirit as well. Without these qualities, the Bathsheba affair would have destroyed him.

It is rare for an indulgent soul to grant itself only one liberty. Usually a granted liberty becomes the foundation of a future license. After having sent the army out to do battle rather than leading it, David became easy prey to sexual indulgence (see 2 Samuel 11:2-5).

After Bathsheba became pregnant, the king tried to protect himself from scandal. First he tried to cover-up approach. Then, under pressure, he openly dealt with the problem. Within the context of Christian ministry, some mistakes are more forgivable than others. Mistakes in judgment, I believe, can generally be forgiven. On the other hand, mistakes involving immorality are not so easily forgiven, particularly in the more conservative denominations. But whether any mistake is forgiven depends upon the approach that the leader takes in seeking reconciliation. There really are only two approaches that can be taken. The first is the cover-up approach, in which case a congregation must discover the sin. This approach is somehow hardest to forgive. The second approach is the openness approach. This confessional bridge is self-revelatory. It is much easier to forgive.
The Cover-Up

The cover-up approach is totally ego-defensive. It is based on the false idea that “people will think less of me if they really know what I am or what I have done.” However, the real truth is that people can accept weakness more readily than hypocrisy. David’s hypocrisy appeared in his attempt to fool his friend Uriah (see 2 Samuel 17). Cover-up usually attempts to bypass God’s requirement of repentance. While we cover up our sins, we usually are failing to seek the forgiveness of God. The sin of failing to seek repentance is the real unforgivable sin. This smug, self-satisfied hypocrisy feels little need of reaching out to God. Usually, when we don’t beg forgiveness from those we hurt, we don’t seek God’s forgiveness either.

Genuine confession begins in the free admission that, when we hurt others, we really hurt God. God loves everyone. So passionate is that love that our very injuries become the wounds of God.

Stop-Gapping God’s Spirit

In his book, The Valiant Papers, Calvin Miller suggest that Satan fell out of favor with God by taking liberty from his disciplined necessity of praise. Satan began his fall by skipping his “morning alleluias.” David’s plunge into sin did not begin just by watching Bathsheba take a bath. It really began by taking little liberties. He stayed home at a time when kings go forth to battle (see 2 Samuel 11:1-3). As a powerful leader, he began to demand less of himself than he did of his followers. David, because he was a king, excused his lack of discipline. He somehow felt that it would be all right to let others do the fighting while he slept late. He would use Saturday morning for his own agendas. But does the passage imply even more? Did David also take some liberties with his spiritual disciplines as well? Did he skip his morning alleluias?

We who lead are always accountable for our morning alleluias. When we begin to “sleep in,” we too begin our own fall. Sooner or later we sleep through our important meeting times with God. All spiritual accountability is lost. It is a great moment in the fifty-first Psalm when David at last acknowledged, “Against thee, thee only have I sinned” (Psalm 51:4, KJV). With this admission, David’s split soul turns back to God. Psalm 51 shouts this one great truth: Our primary sins are never against those we wrong. Our primary sins are against God.

Ending Cover-Up: Self-Protection Yielding To Self-Surrender

Cover-up is a face-saving device designed to protect our reputation. Those who resort to it opt for saving their image, usually at the price of losing their authenticity.

There is only one way out of this egocentric deception. We must return to the source of all spiritual vitality—surrender. Such surrender grows for the leader, as it does for
the follower, out of the double taproot of Galatians 2:20. We must be crucified with Christ to live meaningfully. We must take from Galatians 2:20 and Romans 6:11 and reckon ourselves dead. Then our demanding self-image can gradually lose its power over us.

It is difficult to rebuke egocentric leadership. The disease affects us all. But it is not hated at all to prescribe the cure. The cure lies in surrender. G. K. Chesterton pictured Francis of Assisi breaking with his father’s dreams. Francis would never take over the family business as his father hoped. The young Francis was not free to serve himself. He had been bought with a price (see 1 Corinthians 6:20). After this sublimation of his life to Christ, things financial lost their hold on him. How submissive was Francis? Well, they say he had a custom of kissing lepers in ordinary greeting. Kissing lepers is only for those who have given so much away that they have nothing else to lose.

Christian leaders who really move their world are not generally conscious of their self-surrender. Yielding to Christ has become so much a part of them that they no longer see anything remarkable in it.

Cover-up is a kind of sickness for those who forget that their careers have significance to God alone. To be successful is to be obedient. Great leaders want only this yielded definition of success. “Besides,” said Jesus, “What doth it profit a man if he becomes a CEO and loses his relationship with God” (see Luke 9:25)? Lord, teach all of us who lead to pray this simple prayer, “God, may my double mindedness fade to single issue: ‘for me to live is Christ’ (Philippians 1:21). Then, Father, my leadership will know no duplicity of image, for there will be nothing to cover up.”

**The Openness Approach: Psalm 51:4, 12-14**

No one expects a flawed leader to lead flawlessly. But everyone, even people whose lives are flawed, expect moral leadership. If we are guilty of anything morally compromising, we must quickly become overt rather than covert in dealing with our trespasses. We should openly acknowledge our failures. Our failures teach us our need for God. God remains our Father even when we lose. Sid Lovett prayed the “Loser’s Prayer” at the annual Kodak banquet gathered to select the coach of the year. “Thou art a God of mercy and so we lift before Thy care those coaches, who with endurance and honor but a losing record, are grateful for a new year. Deliver them from the nightmares of instant replay and sullen alumni. And if it please Thee, bestow upon them surefingered ends, fleet runners with secure cartilages, and linemen of granite.”

To be human is to be open about our humanity. We all lose, but all losers begin to look like winners the moment they become open about losing. Sadly, in David’s case, his openness turned out to be an induced openness. Sooner or later our sins find us out. So it is best to be openly confessional.
When the leader covers up, the church is informed by covert gossip and innuendo. The leader’s sins become less forgivable than when the leader bares his soul voluntarily. Psalm 51 is the record of David’s coming out of the closet. His openness began where it ought, with God. It is clear from the story that he was forced—probably by a blitz of gossip—to acknowledge his sin. Gossip is viciously explosive.

The healing process for our moral mistakes can bring healing only in this three-step process:

**Step One: Acknowledging Our Hypocrisy**

Which of us who lived through Watergate will ever forget its horrible end? I will always be able to recall Richard Nixon under threat of impeachment, as he walked that hideous red carpet to mount the helicopter. He didn’t just leave the White House, but the presidency of the United States. How haggard his steps! How visible the rounding of his shoulders! How obvious his downcast eyes! How humiliated his family! How shredded his dignity! One thing that had caused this sad spectacle: cover-up. He failed to acknowledge his hypocrisy. Many historians and political analysts feel that if the President had spontaneously acknowledged his sin, his sins might all have been forgiven. But protesting his innocence while the unfolding evidence indicated his complicity, was at last unforgivable.

David’s acknowledgment came later. But in Psalm 51:4 he confessed that his primary offense was not against Bathsheba or Uriah or Israel. The worst king of complicity is spiritual rather than political.

David’s repentance was written in much pain (see Psalm 51:12). The real price we pay for our hypocrisy is lost joy. But the pain is always a healer. When our brokenness is splinted with the pain of our confession, then healing can begin.

**Step Two: Coming To Repentance**

Repentance is not telling God what we have done wrong. God could scarcely be God and need us to inform Him on any subject.

Repentance has a single aim: the restoration of relationship. God knows the exact nature of our sins and their effects on our lives. Since we cannot enlighten God’s understanding of our sins, why bring them up at all? Because every unconfused sin adds another brick on a wall of our broken relationships. Ultimately that wall will separate us from Him. Repentance, on the other hand, obliterates that wall and makes us one. Repentance is not informing God about our morality. It is a heart cry of acknowledgment. It is crying over the awful distance that has come to separate us from Him.
Consider the realm of marital relationships. When mates offend each other, each knows the other’s transgression. How shall such marriages be restored? The question is not one of telling each other what they have done wrong. The rupture will heal around marital repentance. Someone must say: “I’m sorry. I agree that I have done wrong. I ask you to forgive me. I want every wall in our relationship to come down.”

For every leader the same principle holds true. A congregation may feel that the pastor is covering up some sin. Still, there is no chance of healing until the wrong is acknowledged and the relationship restored.

**Step Three: The Restoration Of Praise**

After his sin, David promised to teach transgressors to praise God (see Psalm 51:12-15). Praise, at its ultimate, forsakes its intrigue with failure. It wakens within us an intense focus on God and His glory.

Praise moves the focus from our pain to the person and work of Jesus Christ. Praise is immensely liberating because it gets our minds off ourselves. Glorifying God pulls our mired souls from the slough of failure, and we really are positively free.

**Conclusion**

Are pastors to be forgiven any more readily than others? No, but neither are they to be judged more severely. Pastors are leaders whose temptations are immense. In some ways the counseling pressures laid on them sets them up for moral compromise. They do not often fall. When they do, a kind of Christian charity ought to keep the unfallen redeemed from shooting their wounded. They, like laypersons, can never be excused for licenses they grant themselves. But overly harsh judgment from either pastors or laity cannot be condoned. Paul, warning us against such a spirit, once said, “Let him who thinks he stands take heed, lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12, KJV). An unthinkable severity prompts unforgiving spirits. Such Christians, in an earlier time, would have picked up stones against the poor woman in John 8. Jesus’ invitation was, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to cast a stone at her” (John 8:7, AMP).

David of Israel instructs us. Leaders can survive a visible mistake. Their leadership can survive it as well. I do not say this to encourage moral looseness. But let the church call her fallen to hope. Judges 16:21-22 records of Samson: “The Philistines took him and put out his eyes…Howbeit, the hair of his head began to grow again” (KJV).

We preachers tend to measure our success in the number of Philistines we convert. Samson measured the success of his leadership totally in the number of dead Philistines. This may seem a bit morbid. Still, if you grant him the joy he found in killing Philistines, his triumph is remarkable. If you graph out the number of
Philistines he slew, you must concede that Samson succeeded. Israel felt that his Philistine-killing was worthy of mention in the Scriptures. His last stand in the temple of Dagon was *Fortune* magazine stuff. Standing with his arms around the two middle pillars of the house, he prayed for a successful conclusion to his life.

Can a leader survive a visible mistake? The Scriptures testify, “So the dead which he slew at his death were more than those he slew in his life” (Judges 16:30, KJV). Did God hear an old Nazarite who had slept with his enemy and corrupted himself with immoral drunkenness? See the titan Samson bend himself against the cold stone. The columns groan. His anguished soul begs God to hear him in spite of his old sins. “Oh Lord God, remember me. I pray Thee, and strengthen me. I pray Thee, only this once” (Judges 16:28, KJV).

Samson does not survive his mistakes. He does serve God beyond his earlier failures. And he who was once set aside because of his sin is named once more a champion.