**Ethics – Foundations**

Ethics pertains to the identification of what is good and right, and how to make those determinations. It corresponds to “wisdom” in Proverbs.

Three approaches for defining what is right and good:

1. Deontological. Actions are judged to be right or wrong, in themselves, based on rules and principles. Focus is on the deed itself.
2. Teleological, or consequential ethics. Actions are judged according to their consequences. Focus is on the results.
3. Virtue ethics. We are to act according to standards of character, in a way that develops character. Focus is on the person’s inner character, especially integrity.

Four levels of ethical standards:

1. What is “right” for each specific particular situation
2. Rules that are applicable to many situations, but with exceptions, and sometimes specific to a particular culture
3. Principles that are applicable to all cultures, without exceptions
4. Top-level themes and narratives from which principles can be derived

Two sources of Ethical knowledge:

1. Humanistic – created by reason, personal authority, or feelings
2. Divine revelation (general and special) – a gift from God

Human sources are always seriously inadequate, leading to paganism and rationalism, and incoherent ethics. We must have revelation as the source of any trustworthy and universally applicable ethics. Oftentimes, for apologetic purposes, theologians attempt to lay a human foundation, and then supplement it by revelation. Aquinas taught four cardinal virtues from Aristotle (courage, temperance, justice, prudence), and added the three divine virtues of faith, hope and love. The better way is to accept revelation from God as the foundation, and then apply human reason to develop an understanding of what is revealed. As stated in Proverbs, the beginning is the fear of the Lord, but we must then also study and meditate to acquire understanding (Proverbs 4:7). This is “faith seeking understanding”. *“Give me understanding, that I may observe Your law and keep it with all my heart.”* - Psalm 119:34

Scripture teaches us ethics using all three approaches (deontological, teleological, and virtues of character), and at all levels (specific situations, rules, principles, themes). The top-level themes revealed in scripture are seen in the overall story or narrative of what God has done from beginning to end, as Creator and Redeemer. It is the narrative of the kingdom, now engaged in spiritual warfare, but destined for victory in the summing up of all things in Christ. This grand narrative reveals God’s character, His principles, and His objectives.

It is then our obligation to make our own personal life stories (narratives) fit in with and harmonize with God’s story. We are like actors, writing our own lines and acting them out, in a way that fits properly into the great drama that God is directing. We are to harmonize with Him, like a player in an orchestra or a singer in a chorus. Another analogy, frequently used in scripture, is that of walking on a journey, on the way that He provides. This is presented in Psalm 1; 139:23-24; and the New Testament reveals that Jesus is the “Way” (John 14:6). The prophet Micah summarizes Godly ethics in terms of two major principles, and a humble walk:

*“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”* - Micah 6:8

By knowing God, we can know what we are supposed to become. By harmonizing with our Creator, we acquire God-like character (virtue), we attain inner integrity (Psalm 15:1,2), we share His principles, and we will reach the final goal of creation.

Specific rules are found throughout scripture, applicable to the culture of the time. We must derive general principles from these rules, as part of the task of “understanding”, and then we can derive specific rules applicable to our own culture. An example: “*you shall make a parapet for your roof*” (Deuteronomy 22:8) is a rule expressing the principle that we must not expose others to hazards. This can then be the basis for many other rules applicable to our culture, such as “build a fence around your pool”, or “fasten your seat belts”.

One’s personal narrative is developed by training, resulting in habitual, instinctive behavior, behavior that comes from the heart. This training, which develops virtuous character, comes both from learning scripture (2 Timothy 3:16), and by imitating parents and the church community. It is training that occurs both subconsciously (by living in a family and community that sets the proper examples) and consciously (by explicit teaching from scriptures).

Christian ethics necessarily depend upon the entire Christian world-view and narrative, especially the Christian teleological purpose and hope. There is thus no way to convince the world of our ethical positions, or to impose them upon the world, except by converting them to the Christian faith. Our ethics cannot be separated from our faith, or from training within the Christian community (the church). More specifically, Jesus Himself is the way, truth, life. It is the narrative of His life, extended by the Spirit into the church, which provides our authoritative ethical tradition.

Subsequent lessons will address the following:

1. Major Biblical principles: Holiness of God and the Love of God
2. The final objectives: The kingdom of God and the glorification of God
3. Three categories of current issues: sexual morality, sanctity of life, and politics

*“O Lord, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy hill?  
He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, and speaks truth in his heart.”*

- Psalm 15:1-2

“*How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,  
Nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers!  
But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night.*“

- Psalm 1:1,2

**Holiness and Love**

Holiness

The Hebrew word translated as “holy” is *qadosh* , which has the root meaning of “cut off”. As applied to God, it indicates that He is totally other and different than anything or anyone in the creation. “*Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.”* - Isaiah 6:3 (and Revelation 3:8). There is none like Him. *“Who is like You among the gods, O Lord? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, awesome in praises, working wonders?” -* Exodus 15:11*.* See also Psalm 86:8 and Jeremiah 10:6.

An aspect of God’s holiness is that He is true to Himself. He is therefore unchanging in character, *“the same yesterday, today, and forever“* (Hebrews 13:8). With Him, ”*there is no variation or shifting shadow*.“ (James 1:17b). His principles displayed in the creation are therefore applicable for all time - those principles inherent to the original design and purpose of creation, such as creating order out of chaos. Consider Jesus’ statement on divorce: *“from the beginning it was not so...”* (Matthew 19:8), and Paul’s condemnation of homosexuality as abandoning natural functions (Rom 1:26-27). These ethical judgments are based on the original nature and intentions of creation.

One consequence of God’s holiness is that we dare not approach Him without being forgiven and cleansed of our sins (see Isaiah 6:1-6; Exodus 3:1-6). Another consequence is that we are also to be holy, i.e. to become sanctified, to fulfill the expectations for those who belong to a holy God. Abraham was called out from Ur, Israel was called out of Egypt, and the church (*ekklesia*) is called out from the world, to belong to God. We are a holy nation (1 Peter 2:9).

Much of the OT law is concerned with maintaining this sanctified status, demonstrating that His people are different from the rest of the world, for they serve a God who is totally different from the gods of this world. The ritual law of sacrifices, of the temple, the priesthood, as well as ritual cleanliness in diet and health regulations, are meant to exemplify and train the people in spiritual holiness. Many ethical precepts, under both the old and the new covenants, are meant to show respect for God, the Holy One, and to show self-respect, as representatives of God to the world. The symbolic meanings of actions, as understood in one’s culture, are thus important.

The many commandments in Leviticus 19, which include both universal moral commandments (“*you shall love your neighbor as yourself*”) and culture-specific regulations (“*you shall not round off the side-growth of your heads nor harm the edges of your beard*”) are all introduced and justified by the demand for holiness:*“Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.’”* - Lev 19:2. This is quoted by Peter as the rationale for his ethical teachings for the church: “*As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written,* ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’” - 1 Peter 1:14-16

Love

The love of God is expressed in the OT using the word *hesed*, which emphasizes God’s covenant-faithfulness. It is a love that endures forever (Psalm 136; Exodus 34:6-7; Isaiah 54:10). It is the love of commitment, of union, and of deep passion, as in a marriage (Hosea 2:19-20). Consider also God’s compassion for Nineveh (Jonah 4:11). He is the God Who is “*compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth*” (Exodus 34:6).

In the NT, the Greek word *agape* is essentially redefined by the apostles to give it a new meaning that corresponds to *hesed*. In 1 Corinthians 13:7-8a, *“love (agape) bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails”.* This surpasses the prior meanings of any of the Greek words for love, as it also surpasses the wide range of meanings given to the English word “love”, or the Spanish “amor”. The meaning of Christian love thus surpasses anything that is from or of the world.

God’s love is a love that lays down His own life for His people:

“*For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*” - Romans 5:6-8.

Also: “*This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends*” – John 15:12-13.

It is Paul’s prayer that the church would learn to comprehend such love:

*“...that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.”* - Ephesians 3:17b-19.

This love is passionate, with a deep emotional desire for union with the beloved. In seeking what is good for the other, one also seeks what will be good for oneself. We are commanded to love your neighbor as yourself, not instead of. Love acknowledges that we all have common interests, in view of our hope of ultimate unity. We have compassion, rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep, because our own destiny is inseparable from the destiny of others: “*the summation of all things in Christ*” (Ephesians 1:10). It is a union that is in the Lord. It is for this hope that Jesus endured the cross (Hebrews 12:2). This is the kind of love found in the Song of Songs: a wonderful combination of the deepest passion and unending commitment.

Passion without commitment, as in the romantic “love” of the world, falls short. A self-sacrificing commitment with no passionate joy of union also falls short. True *hesed* or *agape* is a passionate bond that endures all things and hopes all things. It never fails. Such a love for God compels us to do anything and everything to please Him. As Augustine said: “*love, and do what you will*”.

**The Kingdom and the Glory**

Kingdom

When approaching ethics according to the criteria of consequences of behavior (i.e. teleologically), we need to consider what the scriptures present as the final good to be achieved both for the creation, and for God. The former is described as the kingdom of God (or kingdom of heaven), and the latter as the glory of God. These are the two supreme goals of life: the kingdom of God and the glory of God.

The kingdom of God (or of heaven) refers to the total subjection of all things to God’s reign, wherein His will is done in all the earth, as it is in heaven. This kingdom is a major theme of the prophets (especially Isaiah) and of Jesus (especially in the synoptic gospels). The prophets emphasize that it shall be a kingdom of peace (*shalom*), with perfect harmony among all creatures, and consequent blessings and fulfillment for all. Jesus’ early preaching was centered on the good news that this kingdom is at hand, and His teaching pertained largely to how one can enter the kingdom. The most central teachings on the ethics of the kingdom are found in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7).

Consider first the “beatitudes” (Matthew 5:3-11), especially the ones that would have been the most surprising to the original audience. “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*”. This could be understood as: “*Wealthy are the beggars ..*.”. Entrance into the kingdom is for those who recognize their spiritual poverty, i.e. that they are not self-sufficient, but in desperate need of God’s grace and instruction and training. They are like Agur (of Proverbs 30), or like children. Because they know their neediness, they are willing to listen to the Lord, to learn from Him, to receive correction, and to submit. As Jesus also said: *“For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.”* - John 9:39.

“*Blessed are the meek (or gentle), for they shall inherit the earth.”* This is often misunderstood, because of the inadequacy of the English word “meek”. The correct meaning is not a weak passiveness and compliance, but rather a gentleness of controlled strength and resolve. It is the non-violent exercise of real power. This is consistent with fighting spiritual battles, truly and effectively opposing evil, in the non-violent way of love (not returning evil for evil). This is the way to eventually prevail and rule over the earth. This is reinforced in verse 9: “*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God*.”

Even though we look to the kingdom of peace, there is presently a struggle in this world wherein we are victims of violence: trials, tribulations and persecutions. But Jesus assures us that we are nevertheless blessed, “*for your reward in heaven is great*” (5:11). See also John 16:33.

Another verse that is often misunderstood is Matthew 5:39 - “*But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also*.” An alternative translation, much more consistent with all other scripture, would be “*do not resist in an evil manner*”. That would be essentially the same as the teaching: “Do not repay anyone evil for evil.” (Rom 12:17-18; 1 Peter 3:9; Proverbs 26:4). If someone insults you by a back-handed slap to the right cheek, they are treating you as an inferior, in an attempt to dominate. The proper response is to dare him to strike you on the other cheek, which would be a slap from the open palm, treating you as an equal. It is a statement that we will not stoop to their level (by violent retaliation), nor will we be intimidated. In matters of truth and righteousness, we do not back down, but we will overcome their evil with good. We thus heap hot coals upon them, in the hope that they will repent (Romans 12:20).

Another crucial consideration is that the kingdom is a community: our fulfillment is corporate, in contrast to the individualism so prominent in our present culture. We look to a future perfected unity of the saints, and are morally obliged to presently live with one another in unity. Consider how the Lord’s prayer is in the plural: teaching that our personal needs and destiny are inseparably linked with the entire community of God’s people, both of the present day, and of all the ages. This unity is implicit in love: loving others as yourself.

As Christians, we have entered the kingdom, we serve the kingdom, and fight the spiritual battles by which the kingdom of God overcomes the kingdoms of the world. And we are called upon to do this in a manner consistent with the kingdom principles of peace and love, seeking the ultimate unity and harmony of all creation.

Glory

Our final purpose, from a God-centered perspective, is to glorify God. This is the true final end. All else is subsidiary. The Hebrew word for glory, *khabod*, has the root idea of weightiness. It is the public display and manifestation of God’s infinite beauty and worth and righteousness. It is the revelation of His holiness, making the invisible visible:

“*Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory*.” - Isaiah 6:3.

The whole earth being filled with His glory can be considered analogous to the temple being filled with His glory. Similarly, the heavens tell of His glory (Psalm 19:1), and His good works display His glory (Exodus 33:18-19). Above all, Jesus reveals His glory (John 1:14; 13:31; 17:1-5; Hebrews 1:3).

Consequently, the church, as the body of Christ, we who have the life of Christ within us, are also called to glorify God. Our pre-eminent ethical purpose is to live in a way that glorifies God: “*Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*” - Matthew 5:16. “*My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples*.” - John 15:8.

The final goal of ethics is to glorify God, through all our works. We are to make His perfect character, His holiness, His love, visible to the world, through the visible life of the church. Our goal is that “*the whole earth be filled with His glory*” - Psalm 72:19.

**Sexual Morality, Sanctity of Life, Politics**

When seeking guidance from scriptures on specific controversial ethical questions, Christians most often turn to specific Old Testament commandments (as in Exodus and Leviticus), or to the corresponding lists of sins in the New Testament (such as in Romans 13:13; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Tim 1:9-10; Revel 21:8; 22:15). But these rules and lists require interpretation – to understand the intended range of meanings of the terms, and the range of application for the rules. “Murder” is understood as certain kinds of forbidden killing; “lying” might sometimes be justified; sexual immorality is a broad category that requires further definition to know what it includes.

One needs to turn to more general principles to obtain a deeper understanding, to properly interpret and apply the rules. Two absolute and universal governing principles that are of utmost importance are:

1. God, as sovereign, has the right of ownership of all things. This is contrary to the world’s notions of intrinsic human rights.
2. The final purpose for all things is the glory of God. This is contrary to the world’s notion that the final purpose or goal is what we believe to be good for ourselves.

The emphasis here will be to show how these principles should be applied to some of our contemporary ethical issues.

Sexual Morality

The worldly, humanistic view of sexual morals is driven by desire for personal pleasure (hedonism), and/or a human-centered sense of emotional “fulfillment”. In contrast, the Christian and Godly perspective must be driven by an understanding of God’s sovereignty and His eternal purpose. On the first point, consider the following scriptures:

1 Corinthians 6:12-20 — “*The body is not for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body*” (6:13b). “*Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit...that you are not your own...you have been bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body*” (6:19,20)

1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 -- “*the will of God, your sanctification; that you abstain from sexual immorality*”. “*God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification*” (4:7)

This first principle is that God created us for Himself, we rightly belong to Him, and we are morally obliged to acknowledge that we belong to Him, which is the point of sanctification. And Paul makes it clear that this includes our bodies and our sexuality. This means that it is God’s right to dictate to us how to use our bodies. We do not have the right to defy Him for the sake of man-made purposes.

The second principle pertains to the content of His purpose, which is expressed in the following: “*I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.*” - 2 Cor 11:2. “*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church...” that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word...So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies” ... “I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church*”. - Ephesians 5:24-32

There is an analogy between the husband/wife relationship and the relationship of Christ to the church. Human marriage is supposed to represent and depict the final kingdom purpose of the union of the church with Christ. In order to properly depict a pure and faithful union with Christ, there must be a corresponding pure and faithful union between a man and a woman in the institution of marriage. Marriage is a formal public covenant commitment, corresponding to the covenant commitment between God and His people, between Christ and the church. Sexual relations outside the covenant of marriage symbolically amounts to spiritual adultery – serving other gods.

If our relationships with one another are defiled, then our relationship with God is correspondingly defiled. One who is faithful in the things of this world will be faithful to God; one who is unfaithful in the things of this world will be unfaithful to God. This is a general principle, which applies to sexual morality. Sexual holiness and faithfulness express holiness and faithful intimacy with Christ. The horizontal and vertical relationships are reciprocal and interdependent. We cannot be faithful in heavenly things unless we are first faithful in earthly things (Luke 16:10). Integrity requires holiness and faithfulness in all relationships. We cannot curse man and bless God (James 3:9-10); cannot be reconciled to God unless reconciled to one another; cannot love God without loving one another; cannot receive forgiveness from God without forgiving one another. What you do either for or against others, you do for or against Christ (Matt 25:40).

This connection between human sexual relations and spiritual relationship with God works in both directions. As explained in Romans 1, God hands people over to sexual perversion when they reject Him and serve false gods. Sexual sin may not be any worse than other categories of sin, but it more clearly reveals the underlying sin of idolatry, which is spiritual adultery. Paul particularly points out that homosexual behavior defies what is “natural”, i.e. what God’s purposes are as revealed in the original creation: male and female to become one flesh, and for them to be fruitful and fill the earth. Behavior that defiantly mocks that intention, mocks God.

Sanctity of Life

To say that life is “sacred” is to say that it belongs to God. Some scriptural examples of this teaching are: “*The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord*.” – Job 1:21b. “*Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine...”* - Ezekiel 18:4a. “*It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture.”* - Psalm 100:3b

God, as sovereign creator, has the right to take away what He has given, but no one else has that right. He has given life for a purpose, and it is a sin against God to preempt His purpose and plan. Furthermore, the identity of a living soul, of a person, extends throughout the person’s life, from past into the future. God owns our future as well as our past and present. The value of life consists in its intended God-given purpose, it’s destiny and potential to fulfill His purpose, and the price God has paid for the redemption of each and every soul. This is contrary to the world’s view that the value of a life consists in the perceived “quality” of a life in the present. No one has a right to interfere or pre-empt God’s purposes for a life that belongs to Him.

The sin of “murder” thus includes abortion and euthanasia. On the particular issue of abortion, the following is especially relevant: “*You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother’s womb...Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Your book were all written the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them.”* - Psalm 139:13-16. He knows and cares for the future of the unborn, just as a mother imagines and hopes for the future life of her unborn child.

Politics

The central question of politics is: given that the kingdoms of the world have radically different values and purposes than the Kingdom of God, to what extent should Christians participate in and support the kingdoms of the world. An important principle is revealed in the following scripture:

“*Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience’ sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor*.” -- Romans 13:1-7

Similar teaching is given in 1 Peter 2:13-17. As individuals, we have no right to seek vengeance or execute judgement; that belongs to the Lord (Rom 12:19). But the Lord has delegated these responsibilities, on earth, to “governing authorities”. That means we can participate in retributive justice if we are acting in the service of a legitimate government. Paul gives similar instructions relative to other social relations in the “household codes”, as below.

“*Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.”* - Col 3:22-24

[also Ephesians 6:5-7] “*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right*” -- Ephesians 6:1.

We are to serve others in positions of authority in the world, but with qualifications: insofar as they are “ministers of God”, according to what is their due, “for the Lord’s sake”, and “in the Lord”. When we serve others, it is always with the attitude of ultimately serving the Lord, and is therefore constrained to behavior and purposes that are acceptable to the Lord.

Do we lend support and help to those who are evil? The answer is to love the person without supporting or condoning their sins. This is analogous to what God does when He makes rain to fall and sun to shine on both the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45). Similarly, we are to do good to those who are of the world; support them to the extent that it can be in the Lord, glorifying God.

Even though our own nation has a constitution that makes it superior to any other - in terms of justice and liberties - it is not perfect. The founding ideas of inalienable rights - life, liberty, pursuit of happiness - are admirable constraints upon civil government power, but are not quite consistent with Christian ethics of the kingdom of heaven under our sovereign God. God has all ownership rights; we are stewards. We should not substitute the American public religion for the faith revealed in scriptures.

Capitalism is a good system for providing opportunities for individual development, to be freed economically from government power, liberating the people for maximum productivity; but it promotes idolatrous consumerism, and places little if any constraints on greed or oppressive power of the wealthy. The extreme alternative of socialism has good intentions of mercy for the poor, but inevitably oppresses all people under stifling totalitarian government power, and is thus economically devastating as well as politically oppressive. There is no economic or political system or structure that can ensure justice and righteousness, because the source of unrighteousness is the sinfulness of the human heart - a sinfulness that is universal and cannot be remedied by any human ideology or institution. The only kingdom that can fulfill the desire for righteousness is the kingdom of God.

So, what kind of support can we give to governments? John the Baptist instructed tax collectors to “*collect no more than what you have been ordered to*”, and the soldiers to “*not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages*” (Luke 3:12-14). Similarly, we can work for the government or for corporations that are in many ways corrupt, as long as we don’t personally engage in the corrupt practices.

Since governments are ordained by God for the purpose of maintaining peace, by the sword, a Christian can participate in law enforcement, in criminal justice, and in the armed forces. But there is always the constraint of doing so “in the Lord”. For that reason, we need not be pacifists, but neither do we give unquestioning, absolute obedience to superiors. There is always a critical responsibility to discern good and evil. This is the basis of “just war” theory. We can support and engage in warfare to the extent that it is “just”, but only to the extent that it is “just”. There are also problems with loyalty oaths. Uncritical and absolute allegiance to any human institution or ideology is idolatrous. A way to usually resolve this is by silently applying the condition: “in the Lord”.

Whatever we do, living in the world involves us inevitably in community sin, makes us complicit with the sins of the world, in Adam. If nothing else, we are all to some extent beneficiaries of the sins of previous generations – inheritors of “blood money”. Like Isaiah, we all “*live among a people with unclean lips*”.

The answer is two-fold: continually seek cleansing atonement for unintentional sins; and in our hearts, whatever we do, do all to the glory of God.