

The Summit Chronicle

Come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord — Isaiah 2:3



Issue 1 Vol 1

A free monthly publication for the Church of Christ worldwide

Feb 2007

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If you would like to write for The Summit Chronicle, please feel free to email us on the email address below. Criteria applies.

Proverb of the Month

"Like a city that is broken into and is without walls, so is a man who has no control over his spirit".

— Proverbs 25:28

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SILENCE: The hermeneutic that's prohibitive by **Allan G. Fowell**

One of the controversies that has raged in the world of "Christendom" for centuries is the matter of whether or not the "silence" of the Scriptures must be respected or ignored. Some allege that whatever is not expressly forbidden is allowed in religious practice; others contend that anything not authorized is not permitted. Thomas Campbell, in His declaration and address, spoke passionately about the authority of the word of God in the realm of religious change. The anchor that brought it all together was found in the all encompassing declaration, "Speak where the Bible speaks and remain silent where the Bible is silent." The "slogan", as some have called it, set the tone for an excellent hermeneutical approach to many bible difficulties with those difficulties being in areas of what God permits and does not permit. The statement not only became the motto for the restoration period of Campbell but also represented a very basic New Testament principle found in the epistle of Peter.

"If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers,

let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen." (I Pet 4:11). The mandate of this passage is, when we speak we "speak as the oracles of God." This involves two primary things (1) speaking that which is in accord with the truth of God's inspired word, and (2) speaking all that the Bible says without any subtractions.

The Bible must be understood in the light of how it teaches and the fact that ultimately Christ has all authority. A number of New Testament passages teach this (Jude 3, II Tim 3: 16-17, Gal 1: 6-9). How does the word authorize? The word teaches by explicit statement, by implicit statement, approved example and expediency and through silence. When we look at 'silence' we ask if that silence is permissive or prohibitive. The argument goes back a long time. The dispute surfaced early in the post-apostolic age. Tertullian (A.D. 150-222) spoke of those who contended: "the

thing which is not forbidden is freely permitted." He replied: "I should rather say that what has not been freely allowed is forbidden."

1. Silence, is it permissive? The great protestant reformer, Martin Luther, made the argument that the silence of the scriptures was always "permissive."
2. In other words, he was asserting, very strongly, that, if the Bible did not specify and explicitly condemn an action, that such an action would be permissible. During that early Reformation period, Martin Luther (1483-1546) taught: *"whatever is without the word of God is, by that very fact, against God."*
3. He frequently appealed to Deuteronomy 4:2 *"Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish aught from it."* He then gradually modified his view. Later Luther wrote: *"Nothing ought to be set up without scriptural authority, or if it is set up, it ought to be esteemed free and not necessary"*
4. Finally, he declared: *"What is not against Scripture is for Scripture, and Scripture for it"*

5. (A. H. Newman, *A Manual of Church History*, Chicago: The American Baptist Publication Society, 1902, Vol. II, p. 308).

It seems that, if we allow that silence is permissive then we are allowing what God has not permitted. There are many examples in the Bible where men took such a course and were condemned for it. The most famous example is that of Nadab and Abihu in Leviticus chapter 10. They offered *strange fire*, unauthorized fire, and were destroyed before the Lord. Perhaps these two priests were thinking, “fire is fire and as long as we offer fire to the Lord it does not make a difference.” How wrong they were! Their death shows how serious God is regarding that which is permissive and not permissive. When God stated a certain kind of fire—**all else was automatically excluded**. As priests, they were given specific instructions as to what God wanted, yet they assumed something to be alright, when in effect, it had fatal consequences. From this example we know that the argument for silence being permissive is not a valid argument.

Silence, is it prohibitive?

The prohibitive argument from silence is this: If a doctrine or practice is not authorized by direct command, example, or inference, then it is not allowable. I think a simple illustration sets forth the silence argument. As a parent I give my child, Joseph, a ten-dollar note, and tell him to go the store and buy a pint of milk and some sliced bread. Joseph returns home with the milk, the bread, some change and four pieces of candy bar. Joseph is told in no uncertain terms, “I did not say to get candy bars!” Joseph replies, “you did not say I couldn’t.” The statement is true, but Joseph learns that my silence on the matter

did not constitute permission to go ahead and buy candy. Silence is not permissive but prohibitive.

Lets turn to the Biblical evidence with regard to the prohibitive nature of silence because, in the final analysis, the issue actually is: Does the Bible itself sanction the principle that the “silence” of the Scriptures is prohibitive? That is what counts.

1. Noah constructed the ark, he did so “by faith” (Heb. 11:7), which means the patriarch did “according to all that God commanded him” (Gen. 6:22), or, as the NIV renders the clause: “Noah did everything just as God commanded him.” Though the question is frequently ridiculed these days—when authority is held in contempt—it is still appropriate to ask: Would Noah have been preserved if he had acted upon the presumption that “whatever is not forbidden is allowed” and so had altered the divine pattern for the building of the ark? I don’t think so.
2. The most powerful and compelling arguments for the silence principal is found in the Hebrew letter of the New Testament.

“Therefore, if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law. For He of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood.” (Heb 7: 11-14).

Under the Old Law God specified that the priests must be from the tribe of Levi (Numbers

3:17-39). Concerning priests from the tribe of Judah, “Moses spoke nothing”, that is, he was silent on the matter. God through Moses authorized priests from the tribe of Levi. SILENCE prohibited any from Judah or any other tribe from becoming priests or being part of the priest hood. **In this case we see that silence meant NO, not yes.**

3. In Paul’s letter to the saints at Colossae, he condemned the practice of “will worship”, a disposition which is “after the precepts and doctrines of men” (Col. 2:22-23). W. E. Vine defines “will-worship” as “voluntarily adopted worship, whether unbidden or forbidden.”
4. We have no difficulty in understanding what it means to do that which is “forbidden.” But what does it mean to do that which is “unbidden,” if it is not doing that about which the Bible is silent? Noted lexicographer J. H. Thayer described, “will-worship” as “worship that one devises and prescribes for himself..”
5. (A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958, p. 168). Everett Harrison commented that “will-worship” is that which “is not prescribed by God but only by (the will of) man.”
6. Here is the issue: If one may, with divine approval, operate in the realm of silence, why can’t he “devise and prescribe for himself” whatever pleases him? And yet, it is this very thing that is censured.
7. In the opening chapter of Hebrews, the inspired author argued for the superiority of Jesus Christ over the angels. One of his points was this: One may not place angels in the same class as God’s Son. Why not? Because the Father never “at any time” said to an angelic being: “You are my Son” (Heb 1:5, 13). The principle is this: When God is silent about a matter, humanity has no right to be

presumptuous, and thus to speak (or to act) without his bidding.

Conclusion

Silence does not give consent.

Silence prohibits! We see from the evidence that silence is restrictive. When the scripture gives no authority for a teaching or practice we are forbidden by silence to advocate such a practice. This paper has by no means exhausted all there is to the implications of what it means to speak were the Bible speaks and remain silent were it is silent. However it does demonstrate that silence does not give consent but rather prohibits.

Allan G. Fowell.

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Bible Study and Balance

by Ed Jones *East Tennessee School of Preaching*

Perhaps our worst kept “secret” in the brotherhood is that we are going through some extremely difficult times. Most of us are aware of disturbing changes that are being proposed as well as many unacceptable changes that have already taken place. If ever in the past several decades voices of reason were needed, surely now is that time. Unfortunately, however, reason is not the most common expression we hear. To the left we encounter smooth voices, well-educated speakers, “loving” sounds that fall so very pleasantly on the ear, but voices as from sirens beckoning souls to their spiritual death. To the right are fiery blasts of rhetoric, “sound” salvos from self-appointed guardians of orthodoxy, words of concern, but orations as from masters of war who send troops to die for the sake of pride. What are brethren to do?

THE THEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLE

Perhaps the greatest obstacle hindering brethren from finding a way out of the confusion is the sad fact that the church is not well educated in the Bible. As a people, we are vulnerable to those who advocate extreme positions. The winds of false teaching can all too easily blow us off a sound, biblical

course (Eph 4:14). We must not, therefore, look for short term solutions; we have no acceptable choice except to find answers that will bring complete stability.

In looking for a holistic solution, let me speak to a very important influence on my own Bible study. I am much indebted to two men who helped me to see what I will call a “theological” perspective in understanding the Scriptures. Rex Turner and Franklin Camp taught me to look at the whole of what the Bible



taught on a given matter before I started trying to form a conclusion. I look back with considerable fondness and great appreciation for the wisdom of these two wonderful brothers. It is here, with the “theology” of the thing, that I want to begin our search for biblical

balance. Do remember, this is not a study for those who wish to remain mere children in the faith (Eph 4:14); this study is about growing up in all things (Eph 4:15).

As we look into the theological aspects of finding a way out of the mess we are in, we had best get a good handle on what theology contributes. The idea of theology is to be understood as the way of letting the whole of the Bible contribute to our final understandings of a subject. Even though the Bible only needs to

say something once for it to be true, the whole of what the Bible teaches on a particular subject is not generally found in any one place. Incomplete truth is truthful as far as it goes, but complete truth is the only thing that goes far enough.

As an example of the theological principle in action, consider the apparent conflict between the advice given in II John 9-10 and II Timothy 2: 24-26. Both passages deal with how to treat false teachers, but very different advice is given. John and Paul are certainly not in conflict, so what is the solution? When the whole of the Bibles' teachings are considered, the problem is resolved. Well intending people like Apollos could be worked with more patiently (Acts 18:24-26); those determined to harm to the church were to be given no concessions (I Tim. 4:1-1-4; 6: 3-5). False teaching is false teaching, but those who engage in it have different motivations and are thus to be approached differently. Add factors such as time needed for growth (Heb 5: 11-14), how past experiences can bring misunderstandings (Rom 14:2-7), the gravity of the wrong that has been done (I Cor 5:1), and difference between faith and opinion (Jude 3; Rom 14:1), and you readily see that dealing with false things requires a broad biblical understanding.

THE TORAH PRINCIPLE

In addition to the things we have seen already, there is a principle I style the "Torah Principle" that makes a major contribution toward a full scriptural view. The basic law

for the Jews was found in what they called the Torah of Moses. In these first five books of the Jewish scriptures, the children of Israel found their law code. However, the word "law" in English translations is deceptive. The word in Hebrew is torah. Torah means, "instruction" or "teaching". Therefore, while case law is certainly included in the definition, the whole of the Torah of Moses is torah. The many stories of Genesis and the other books of the torah are all instruction. They show us the prevailing law in action as well as reveal the dynamic of God working with people who are under a particular teaching. In these things we learn much about how to deal with rules as we see them lived out by real people. In other words, we get a feel for implementation as we observe God taking all the applicable factors into consideration and then acting. God is in this method both showing and telling. Later, Jesus would be the greatest example of this principle by coming as one of us (Jn 1:14) to model the behavior that brought to life the rules that God had given for human conduct (Jn 14: 8-9; Acts 1:1).

Yes, the theology of balance requires commitment to a full, rich Bible study (II Tim 2:15). There are complexities present in such an approach. This is simply because life is usually made up of several factors in each new situation we face. The easy way is the way of extremes, but the easy way is not a way God accepts. Good "theology" requires thought. To put it in less academic prose, good "Bible study" requires thought (cf. II Pet 3:15-16; II Tim 2:15).

THE RECIPE (A SPATIAL VIEW)

As we leave this discussion about the importance of completeness in understanding balance, let me try to wrap the idea up in an illustration. After that we will look at specific applications, but first the illustration. We will call this the "Recipe Illustration".

A recipe is a somewhat complicated thing. It has directions that define its purpose, but the directions involve a number of factors. To successfully produce the desired creation, both linear and spatial thinking are required. We generally do fairly well with the linear thinking, the kind that goes in a straight line from point A to point B. A good recipe, however, has some side roads to take along the way. It is this spatial kind of thinking, the type that sees the whole "space" of a thing, that becomes invaluable. The "space" of a recipe involves: temperature (often different levels at different times and for different parts of the mix), ingredients, proportions, various sequences of making and adding, and certain "intangibles" that one acquires through practice. This does not all follow a straight line, things happen at different times and in different ways. Now let me apply this to how we arrive at a balanced theology.

In seeking to avoid extremes, there are a number of "spatial" considerations. Biblical things have differing weights (Matt 23: 23; I Cor 13:13). Some things require more time to master and some things are more fundamentally significant to the success of the whole. Sequence is

also of considerable importance in getting the mix right. Belief must precede repentance and repentance must come before baptism (Acts 2:46-38). Timing can make or break a proper biblical action. In Corinth, a sinful situation needed immediate, public action (I Cor 5: 1-8); more normally, dealing with sins requires that certain things transpire before “going public” (Matt 18:15-17). The timing of when and how to speak is a daily concern (Col 4:5-6; Prov 25:11).

Also, the severity or deliberate nature of an action can make all the difference. For a false teacher who has an agenda, the needed response is swift and hard (II Jn. 9-10); but for someone who is teachable—patience and gentleness are demanded (II Tim. 2:24-26). Apollos was easily called aside and corrected (Acts 18:24-28); Simon the Sorcerer needed a less sympathetic encounter (Acts 8:18-22). To learn how to use the truth and avoid extremes, we must practice and train ourselves to accurately handle the word (Heb. 5:14; II Tim. 2: 15). Such abilities require us to be able to see the whole space of a given circumstance and take the steps that fully use the pertinent principles. There are linear needs in this to be sure, but there are spatial considerations that are required before the will of God is fully appreciated. The Sermon on the Mount is a classic example of Jesus addressing the limited, pharisaic interpretations of the Law of Moses and providing a full, rich correction.

By selecting somewhat different angles in looking into an understanding of balance, we can hopefully get a better feel for what is required for biblical success. Whether we look

through theological eyes, or see the “torah” principle, or observe the spatial makeup of a given problem, **we must view balance as a holistic discipline.** Even as God’s multifaceted nature works in complete harmony, so must we allow the full expression of His revealed will cooperate in the search for well-rounded truth. The word of God is living and active (Heb. 4:12). We cannot allow the word’s richness to be compromised by extremes that exploit and distort its character through substituting a part for the whole.

Part 2 of Bible Study and Balance will be in next month’s issue of *The Summit Chronicle*.

Ed Jones is a teacher at the East Tennessee School of Preaching & Missions. He has written many books and articles from Scripture. Ed and his family were instrumental in helping the New Plymouth church of Christ grow in the mid 1980’s.

Think About It by Jaracz Heather

There has been a lot of excitement in the fields of both physics and, more so, quantum physics, over a subject that is as ancient as the beginning of time: *thought*.

They are now discovering that thought has a **signature pattern** that can be measured using special machines and equipment.

Psychologists have experimented with the power of pure thought and it’s direct effect on physiological responses from the body. The results are nothing short of amazing!

They took top athletes and instructed them to go through

their sports events in their heads. To visualize themselves doing what they do best... to picture themselves winning and achieving the desired result.

What they found was that the body responded physiologically to the pure thought as if they were literally doing it. This is because the mind doesn’t know the difference between what is real and what is imagined.

They’ve discovered that thought has a frequency that is transmitted. And it can now be measured and proven scientifically.

This, however, is nothing new.

The Scriptures have been saying this for hundreds of years that thought is powerful and needs to be controlled.

How we think as Christians makes a HUGE difference as to whether we please God or not. That is why James addresses the issue of sinful thinking in chapter one (Jam 1:13-16).

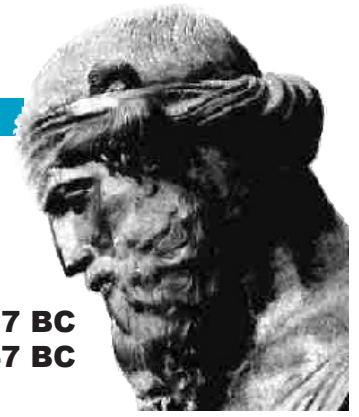
And why Jesus instructed that should a man look upon a woman and lust after her, he has already committed adultery in his heart (Matt 5:28). Its all taking place mentally rather than physically.

The Apostle Paul advises to “*take every thought captive...*” (2Cor 10:5). There are negative thoughts as well as positive. So ask yourself this: If every thought has a signature pattern, what pattern would MY thoughts be generating? For “*As a man thinks, so is he*” (Prov 23:7). And Philippians 4:8 tells us specifically what we as Christians should always be thinking about—the thoughts our minds should always dwell on.



THINK ON PLATO AND EINSTEIN

by Dave Bell



PLATO

B: 428/427 BC

D: 348/347 BC

In this short essay we are looking at the existence of God. The title of course pertains to philosophy and science, and to the fact that science cannot give us any clue as to origins since that is not its warrant, and philosophy by many acts of ‘sophistry’ can only show us what they think about the issue but no hard facts of the case.

Of course it must also be admitted that many so called arguments for the existence of God even if true only show us that God exists but admit nothing of His character in any way whatsoever. However, there is an aspect to the story that helps us immensely as Christians if we but hold on to it. Turn the question around to another aspect and ask the right one. If God did visit earth, who would He be like?

Two things come to mind in the issue.

(1) Axioms, these are irreducible primary things that are in any reasoning. Axioms cannot be proven by any more “basic premises.” A true axiom cannot be refuted since it would need the very axiom as one of its premises thus resulting in circular reasoning.

(2) Two axioms that pertain to this are: (a) “Existence exists” which here means everything that exists and (b) The law of identity. This law simply stated means that if an object or entity has a certain property then it has it.

Regarding propositions its meaning is that if a proposition is

true then it is true for all persons, times, and places.

The arguments we hear against God’s existence invariably leave out and do not address the very fundamental fact of the existence of Jesus Christ.

Now I am not saying that the “intelligent design” argument and such like are of no use at all. I am looking at a neglected part of the “atheistic” arguments for God’s non existence. That part I contend is the fact that the arguments rarely if ever, bring Christ into the equation.

In Hebrews 1:3 we are told that Christ is “the radiance of His (God’s) glory and the **exact representation** of His (God’s) nature. Then in John 5:39 we are told that the Jews of His time, “searched the scriptures because in them they thought they could get eternal life, and it is those same scriptures that bear witness to Christ.”

Then in the next verse He chides them by saying, “and you are unwilling to come to Me, that you may have life.” I would add to this thought, that those who say that there is no God will not go to Christ either so that they may be enlightened.

Christ here is the entity that exists as the exact representation of God’s nature. This at once satisfies our two axioms, existence and identity since any entity that actually exists must have a particular identity. So here, the statement “Christ exists as the exact representation of God’s

nature” the “exists” refers to the axiom of existence and, “Christ being the exact representation of God’s nature”—refers to the axiom of identity.

This also answers the question, if there is a God, who is He like? The historicity of Christ both in the Bible and out of it attest to what God is like. Thus we have for us what God’s nature is, and the empirical evidence of God through Christ left for us. This of course leaves man with “no excuse” not to know God and what His nature is and also not to know the evidence supporting the fact of God’s existence.

Further we can add to this the thought that action is a change in the identity of an entity. All actions have a particular nature, and all actions are determined by the entities involved, and the change of entities occurs based on their identities. This simply means (in this case) that Christ became the human entity that represented the nature of God exactly.

We read of that in Philippians 2: 5-11. Not only so but we also read there of the nature and attitude we should have as God’s creatures. It shows too that as the created we are inferior to the One who created. That in turn highlights the fact that we have no right to presume to tell

the Creator how He should act in regard to us.

The relationship of creature to creator always goes up and not down. Even though Christ was Deity, He was humbled and made “a little lower than the angels.” This explains His relationship to God at that time, but it **never** impinges upon nor impedes the fact that, as to His nature—He was the exact representation of God.

Evolution theory may take us back to a “big bang” but they can never tell us who or what caused it or what its purpose was. This highlights that a carnal mind can only come up with carnal “reasons” and at the same time forget that it takes a mind to create. Evolution would have us believe that “nature” which is unthinking, created everything—including us.

The writer of the book of Hebrews had the measure of this type of pseudo science when in Hebrews 3:4, he says, “every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.”

This is showing us that there is an indisputable presupposition of a builder in every house we see, it is unquestioned for to question it would reveal our stupidity. The implication of a builder is **never questioned**.

Is it not strange then to find that our scientists and philosophers never deny this basic presupposition for the builder of a house yet, however, they turn straight around and deny the exact same presupposition in the greater “house”—the very universe that houses the world.

This actually dethrones reason

completely since the lesser house is assumed to have a builder and that assumption is never questioned.

Yet the “greater house”, the universe that houses everything in it just “happened.” You simply cannot affirm the lesser and at the same time deny the greater when they very clearly assume a builder.


We really do have a sure and certain hope, and the evidence in Christ that God does exist, and that He created the universe. Therefore never be fooled by evolution or philosophy that would affirm the contrary view to the evidence that is before the eyes of anyone who wants to see it.

Dave Bell is a researcher and writer who has written numerous articles as well as a book on Islam. You can find Dave’s fantastic writings on:
<http://www.churchofchrist.org.nz/DavesPage.htm>



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A reminder to Husbands regarding your gift and favor from the Lord...

- Husbands love your wives... Eph 5:25
- An excellent wife is the crown of her husband... Prov 12:4
- He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord. Prov 18:22
- Let your fountain be blessed and rejoice in the wife of your youth. Prov 5.18
- House and wealth are an inheritance from fathers. But a prudent wife is from the Lord. Prov 19:14
- An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels. Prov 31:10
- Husbands love your wives and do not be embittered against them. Col 3:19

You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir in the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered. —1 Pet 3:7

CONCERNING MORAL STANDARD:

Does the answer lie within man?

by Rex Banks



A cursory look at cultures past and present is enough to convince us that human traditions and practices have varied considerably from time to time and from place to place. For example practices such as slavery, apartheid, female circumcision, human sacrifice, holy wars, infanticide and pedophilia have been adopted by some societies but not others. It is not difficult to list and to describe many such differences among social groups separated by time and distance.

However when speaking of these and similar differences among various groups, some individuals do more than simply *describe* the existence of divergent customs. For example some people use words like “**moral, immoral, just, unjust, right, wrong, bad, good**” and suchlike when discussing slavery, apartheid and infanticide and clearly such language goes beyond the merely *descriptive* and enters the realm of *prescription*. In other words those who use such terms are not merely telling us about the way things *are* but they are saying something about the way things *ought to be* or *ought not to be*. Such language signals that we have left the realm of *description* and entered the realm of *normative ethics*, that discipline which is concerned with moral rules and principles. When we study the meaning of words like “good” “right” and “just” we are involved in an area of ethics known as *metaethics*, and clearly the use of such terminology presupposes the existence of some kind of moral standard. In this context we are confronted by two mutually exclusive positions.

- Ethical authority is a *human construct* derived solely from the mind of man and depending completely upon human convention.
- Ultimate moral authority is *transcendent*, meaning that such authority exists apart from man and derives its legitimacy from some source external to him.

A Human Construct

Typically those who insist that ethical systems are *human* constructs locate the source of ethical obligation in the individual or in the group. Epicureanism is an example of the former.

Deriving its name from the Greek philosopher Epicurus (c341-270 B.C.) and associated with Lucretius (99-55 B.C.) in the later Roman period, Epicureanism taught that matter is uncreated and eternal, and denied the immortality of the soul. Happiness was held to be the highest end in living, and for the Epicurean the happiness enjoyed by the *virtuous* person did not arise from unbridled self-indulgence but rather from a mind free from upset and a body free from pain. The prudent person was one who understood the natural order of things and found happiness within the limits set by that natural order. Critics of Epicureanism ask the question “What if one man’s pursuit of happiness results in pain and suffering for others?”

Utilitarianism, associated mainly with the names of Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and John Stuart Mill, (1806-1873) is an example of ethical obligation derived from the group. Its central tenet is *that the rightness or wrongness of an action is determined by the extent to which it tends to increase or diminish the general happiness*. The good action is the one which produces the greatest good for the greatest number of people or which produces more good consequences than harmful consequences (Mill inconsistently attempted to distinguish between *higher* and *lower* pleasures). Critics of Utilitarianism argue that the system justifies the infliction of any amount of pain and suffering upon groups and individuals provided the overall sum of human happiness is maximized.

Now Epicureanism is but one of many proposed systems which attempt to derive ethical obligation from the *individual*, and Utilitarianism is but one of many proposed systems which attempt to derive ethical obligation from the *group*. However as the Greek Sophists of old realized, *all* attempts to explain moral authority purely

in terms of human convention lead to an inevitable conclusion. Philosopher Richard Norman explains that among the Greek Sophists the “more radical concluded that, since traditional moral standards are mere conventions, they have no binding force, and the rational way to live is therefore to pursue one’s own interests and power, acting unjustly if one can get away with it” (**The Oxford Companion To Philosophy, moral philosophy, history of**).

Indeed why not draw such a conclusion if moral codes rest on nothing more than human convention? The fact is that if all moral laws originate with man, statements about *good* and *bad* amount to nothing more than expressions of personal preference. If we do not happen to like those moral systems which prohibit lying, cheating and stealing and if we are able to lie cheat and steal to our own advantage why not do so? In short no effective appeal can be made to that man who chooses to pursue his own interests in defiance of all such human systems and at whatever cost to others.

God-centred Morality

Opposed to the view of moral law as a human construct is the position known as *moral realism* according to which moral law is not a function of human will, reason or emotion, but instead possesses an independent existence. Under the heading *deontological ethics*, Norman discusses “Moral theories according to which certain acts must or must not be done, regardless to some extent of the consequences of their performance or non-performance (the Greek *dei* = one must)... According to deontology, certain acts are right *in themselves*.” Man can *recognize* the existence of moral law or *fail to recognize it*, he can *apply* it or *fail to apply it*, but man’s compliance or non-compliance does not alter the fact that this law exists and it does not affect its content. Morality does not originate with man or depend upon him.

Interestingly Plato taught that what men call “justice” is but a dim memory of a perfect “Form” of justice which has an existence in some world other than man’s own. However although Plato was a theist he did not derive his moral laws from the existence of a deity, whereas our interest is in a particular *theocentric* or *God-centred* ethical system, namely that system set forth in the Christian scriptures.

The Bible affirms unambiguously and unreservedly that moral law is grounded upon and derives its authority from the God who created man. As Creator and Sustainer, God has the same right over man that the potter has over the clay which he is moulding into a vessel (Rom 9:20, 21). By way of clarifying this theocentric position consider the following points:

The Nature of God

Plato’s so- called *Euthyphro dilemma* poses the question “Is the pious loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because they love it?” (**Euthyphro 10a**). This inquiry also challenges those who adhere to the *divine command theory* to consider the question: “Does God command something because it is right, or is something right because God commands it?” This leads on to the next question: “If God commanded men to lie cheat and steal would that make it right to lie cheat and steal?”

Now it is in the answer to these questions that we discover the ground or basis of the theocentric position. Quite simply, scripture teaches that God is perfect in holiness (Isa 6:1-7; Jas 1:17) and that because of this He *cannot* be tempted to do evil (Jas 1:13) and He cannot condone evil (Hab 1: 13). The God of scripture is constrained by His own holiness which means (for example) that He *cannot* lie (Tit 1:2; Heb 6:18) and that He *cannot* command another to lie or cheat or steal. In a nutshell the *divine command theory* is grounded upon the fact that moral law always reflects the perfect unchanging holiness of the God from whom it emanates. Some laws (sometimes called *creation laws*) also reflect the *work* and *order* of God in creation (e.g. male headship [Gen 2:18-25; 1 Cor 11:7-9; 1 Tim 2:8ff]) and some laws simply reflect the divine will at a particular time (e.g. circumcision, baptism) but all divine legislation is always in harmony with God’s nature.

Enlightened self – interest

Although the deontologist differs from both the utilitarian who grounds morality on *consequences* and from the ethical egoist who defines good and bad in terms of *self interest*, this does not mean that there are no appeals to *consequences* and to

self interest in the Bible and this is especially true of the Old Testament. It is in man's self interest to honour parents (Ex 20:12) to give liberally (Prov 3:9) and to obey covenant legislation (Deut 27-30). Appeals to enlightened self interest are not incompatible with the fact that the ground, source or basis of Biblical morality is always and everywhere the perfection of the One who has revealed Himself in scripture.

The role of virtue

Some ethical systems (e.g. those of Plato and Aristotle) deal not so much with rules of behavior or principles of conduct as with the *nature of virtue*. In Scripture principles of conduct and correct modes of behavior go hand in hand with an emphasis upon the importance of a *virtuous character*. Men are to act out of that godly wisdom which is "pure, peaceable, gentle, reasonable (and) full of mercy" (Jas 3:17) and they are to let such fruit of the Spirit as "love, joy, peace (and) patience" adorn their lives (Gal 5:22). Men are not merely to obey God but they are also to *desire* to obey Him (Phil 2:13). To engage in the *right* action (e.g. almsgiving [Matt 6:1-4] evangelism [Phil 1:15-17]) for the *wrong* reason (e.g. the applause of men [Matt 6:1-4] envy [Phil 1:15-17]) is reprehensible. The point is that while *correct action* is vital it is also important that obedience springs from a *virtuous character*.

Mans chief good

Questions about ethics are inseparable from questions about the *nature* and the *purpose* of human existence and according to Scripture human life realizes its goal and possesses real value when the glorification of God through humble submission is its focus (Isa 43:7; Eph 1:6, 12; Eph 3:21; 1 Cor 10:31). Ecclesiastes emphasizes the vanity or futility of human life divorced from God and stresses that man realizes his chief good when he resolves to "fear God and keep His commandments" (Eccles 12:13). Human philosophies which view human existence or the pursuit of happiness or indeed anything other than God as the highest good in life are foolish.

Conclusion

The *divine command* theory of ethics set forth in scripture maintains that there exists an immutable moral law which reflects the perfectly holy nature of the Creator. It is because man shares the moral nature of his Creator that he possesses a moral tendency, setting him apart from the beasts. Man's chief good is realized when he fears God and keeps His commandments.

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Gaining the World But Losing Your Soul by Jaracz Heather

By now most people have heard of the sudden death of *Anna Nicole Smith*. When I learned of her death only a few days ago on T.V., I was deeply saddened. I was sad for no other reason than the fact that she was a person who had everything this life could ever give but tragically lost her soul. It's interesting that when certain events occur in life, likewise certain Scriptures come to mind. In this case, Matthew 16:26 "*For what will a man profit if he gains the whole world and loses his soul. Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?*"

It's a rhetorical question which answers with a definite note—NOTHING! Yet it serves as a constant reminder to us all that we shouldn't be envious of ANY kind of sinful lifestyle that Satan dangles in front of our eyes. For the lifestyle of those who know not God, results in eternal separation away from the presence of the Lord (2Thess 1:7-9).

In Psalms 73, the writer talks of that sinful lifestyle and how he pondered on why the wicked are pain-free, wealthy and don't seem to have any problems like other men. But then a grim answer is given in verses 16-20: "*When I pondered to understand this, it was troublesome in my sight. Until I came into the sanctuary of God; then I perceived their end. Surely Thou dost set them in slippery places; Thou dost cast them down to destruction. How they are destroyed in a moment! They are utterly swept away in sudden terrors. Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when aroused, Thou wilt despise their form.*"

We need to pray for these poor souls that they may find the Lord before it's too late. We know there is rejoicing in heaven over one sinner that repents (Luke 15:7) but the Lord has **NO** pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek 33:11).