

## **The Direction of the Christian Life, II**

Last session we were on the example of Christ as one of God's means of directing us by His grace, and I was emphasizing how the person of Christ really shows us what God's calling for us is. It is not so much about what Jesus would do, but what Jesus would have me to be, in terms of the development of my character according to His example. So the example of Christ is relevant primarily in the formation in us of the virtues. Paul's desire in Galatians is to have Christ formed in us. And I was suggesting last time that we might look at that in terms of the traditional list of deadly sins, which are really root sins. I tried to show last time the scriptural basis for at least some of these being understood as the root of our problems, which God's grace deals with. And if we look at the fruit of the Holy Spirit, the opposite of pride, of course, would be humility. In Matthew 11:29 Christ says, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." And so He calls us to Himself to learn from Him, and particularly to learn the humility that comes from really loving God. It is loving God, knowing who He is as our Creator, being contrite before Him because we are sinful, and loving others who are made in His image. Humility has a positive thrust in Scripture. It is recognizing who we are as creatures of God, and that moves us to serve others in self-confident self-denial. Humility is an aspect of *agape*, which makes no big deal of itself in order to serve others. And I think it may be described as self-confident self-denial. It is quite distinguished, as Sanderson makes clear, from the false low opinion of oneself. It does not involve self-loathing; it involves contrition for our sin, also recognition of God as our Creator and the orientation of our whole lives for His glory, and directing attention away from ourselves to the glory of God, which frees us up for service of Him. So, in a sense, humility is at the top of the list, and humility as it flows from love. A fruit of the Spirit is love, and love after the pattern of Christ is the humility that serves God and one's neighbor.

There is not an exact line-up of the fruit of the Spirit with these seven sins, but you can make a case for a certain relationship. I think that the cure for envy would be thankfulness. The list in Colossians explicitly includes that. Thankfulness is the cure for envy—seeking to be destructive because somebody else is happier or more successful than we are, and we want to look good. It is thankfulness for God's gifts to us and His gifts to others that is the cure for envy. I think thankfulness flows from joy. The quality of thankfulness is an aspect of the joy that the Holy Spirit creates in us. For anger, there is patience and also gentleness. And those qualities flow from the fruit of peace. You have got love, joy, and peace. It seems to me that they are primarily the things that deal with the first root sins. For sloth, I think you could make a case for faithfulness. For avarice, since the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil, "Be full of mercy and good fruit" is a close opposite, from the virtue of goodness. The cure for gluttony is kindness in which, rather than expend everything upon ourselves, we really are outreaching toward others in kindness. And finally, the virtue that supplants lust is self-control. While this is not an exact line-up, it is an approximation. It is difficult to line these things up exactly because we have to speak of the fruit of the Spirit in the singular. Sanderson is big on that point. There is a unity to the fruit of the Spirit. There is a unity to virtue that is lacking in the works of the flesh. They are, in principle, disunifying. And so as the cure for our sinfulness, the fruit of the Spirit deals with them in a number of respects. For example, Paul says to Timothy in order to encourage him, "We did not receive a spirit of timidity but of power and love and self-control." You can see how you could put that all into faithfulness, but there is more to the hunger and thirst after righteousness and the zeal for God's kingdom that goes along with this. So I would say it is probably best for us to try to think not in terms of developing a system of virtue. If you do it, the seven so-called deadly sins are a good starting point for looking at what needs to be overcome in order to produce the quality of life that is like Christ. I think we would probably be better off to take those passages that deal with the virtues separately and preach on

the beatitudes, the fruit of the Spirit, or 1 Corinthians 13, rather than try to be overly systematic and get them in this model.

In any case, the qualities of life have followed the example of Christ, which by God's grace is reproduced in us by the Spirit. That leads us into the next major category, which is the leading of the Spirit. The Law, for all of its divine authority and moral wisdom, cannot change the direction of the human heart and cannot overcome the impulse to sin. That is the work of the Holy Spirit, and the knowledge and insight by which love abounds in the Christian life is the fruit of the Spirit. The key text on the leading of the Spirit is Galatians 5:16-25. I use the term "leading of the Spirit" that is derived from verse 18: "If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under Law." The NIV somewhat obscures the meaning here, so I am using the New American Standard Version. Verse 13 reads, "You were called to freedom. Only do not turn your freedom into the opportunity of the flesh, but through love serve one another." And then beginning at verse 16, Paul turns to the work of the Holy Spirit. "I say, 'Walk in the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh,'" and then that leads him into, "If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under Law." To be led by the Spirit is to have the new impulse of the Holy Spirit to fulfill the love commandment. The leading of the Spirit is not new instruction. The leading of the Spirit is the enablement, the impulse, to fulfill the instructions that are given in the Scriptures. That is why Paul says in verse 25, "If we live by the Spirit," that is, if we have been made alive by the Spirit which is the work of grace within us, "let us also walk by the Spirit." It is a different word there. Probably we should translate it as "keep in step with the Spirit," or "follow the leading of the Spirit." The Spirit does not backpack us to glory. There is a difference between leading and carrying. We are engaged to the fullest extent in this walk, but it is due to the ongoing impulse of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The Christian life is not just regeneration and then we take over. At regeneration, the Holy Spirit takes up His dwelling within us. And it is the continual work of the Holy Spirit within us to produce the fruit that we call the leading of the Spirit. It is the path that the Holy Spirit has already given in the Scriptures that we now have the power to put it into actions. It is the divine enablement of the calling to be and to do God's will for us.

Now, there is a fourth heading that we need to consider, and that is the role of conscience. How does this relate to conscience? The New Testament on the one hand speaks of a good conscience, a pure conscience, and a clear conscience, but it also speaks of conscience that is evil, seared, defiled, or weak. So we have to ask what the assigned role of conscience is. In the book I make the point that for conscience to function properly it must be cleansed by the blood of Christ; otherwise, it will never rest in peace or be informed by the Word of God. First Timothy 1:5 is a useful example of the use of conscience. In 1 Timothy 1:5 Paul writes, "The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." The command he is talking about is the apostolic instruction in verse 3, "Command certain men not to teach false doctrines." Paul is concerned about the Gospel and the goal of the apostolic injunction to eradicate false doctrine from being taught in the church. But love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith, is the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. Those are the work of the Holy Spirit, which leads us in love. You see, Paul's concern for the protection of the Gospel is because that is where purity of heart, goodness of conscience, and sincerity of faith all come from. If you introduce false doctrines, then you cut across all of those. Good conscience here means a sound moral consciousness, one that does not accuse oneself against God's Word and is aware of the forgiveness of God in Christ. If we have our consciences sprinkled by the blood of Christ, a renewed moral consciousness is expressed now in love. Conscience does not decide the principles of right and wrong. Conscience discovers or learns them and then bears witness as to whether a particular action is moral or immoral. Conscience does not decide right and wrong, rather conscience discovers or learns right and wrong and then judges or bears witness to whether a particular action is right or wrong.

So ultimately what conscience is called upon to do is to discern what God holds to be moral or immoral, what God says is right or wrong. So conscience is subordinate to something higher, and a good conscience subordinates itself to the Word of God. This is the great truth that was underscored by Luther. As you know, when he was asked to recant his writings, he asked for a day of reflection. He came back the next day and he said that “unless I am convinced by sound reason and Scripture, I cannot recant anything. It is all true. And to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. My conscience is captive to God’s Word. Here I stand.” I did not know until recently that Luther was taking a position that Thomas Aquinas had taken, although Thomas Aquinas was never faced with the existential issue that Luther faced. This is what Thomas did. He took a position opposite to Peter Lombard, and Aquinas taught that to go against one’s conscience was worse than to go against the teaching of the church, even to the point of accepting excommunication rather than to violate conscience. Now, that is what Luther was facing. His conscience was captive to the Word of God. The church said recant or be excommunicated. Luther said, “I have to be convinced out of Scripture. My conscience is captive to the Word of God.” It was not an autonomous conscience. It was not Luther making up what was right and wrong; it was Luther’s appealing to the higher authority of God’s Word that led him to accept the excommunication of the church. That was a tremendous thing. We can hardly appreciate what that entailed for Luther. And it is interesting, I think, to know that that position had already been taken by Thomas. That is how high a regard they placed on the role of conscience. And we must always do what we believe is right according to our conscience, but what we believe is right must always be tested by the Word of God. And we have to be convinced personally out of the Word, even to the point of excommunication. It is serious business. What the church says has to be reviewed, taken into account, and tried to be understood. But at the last, each of us will stand before God responsible for our conscience and what the Word of God teaches. We are bound to it.

This is why in those passages in Romans 14, and again in 1 Corinthians 8, Paul is so concerned that we do not put undue peer pressure on folks to go against their conscience, even when they are weak in faith and their consciences are weak. That is, they adopt for themselves certain scruples they follow even though God does not require it of them. Paul instructs them not to make those scruples a matter of imposition on others. But on the other hand, those who understand the freedom we have are not to look down with disdain on folks who are serving God through these kinds of rules. And especially, if our conduct emboldens someone to go against their conscience, then we have caused a serious situation to arise. It is not just that somebody will be upset with us, it is rather that you put a kind of peer pressure on folks to go against their conscience to do something that they believe is wrong, and that is serious, even though objectively it may not be wrong. As long as it is subjectively a matter of conscience before them, then it is important that we not override that and push people into that situation.

This way of dealing with a significant role of conscience means that we have to have some way of knowing the difference between right and wrong. So I want to give an excursus at this point on knowledge of the moral law. For conscience to function properly it has to know the moral law; that is, the will of God. My thesis is that the moral law is one, and it is known in two ways. There is only one moral law, because there is only one Lawgiver and Judge, so we live in a moral universe and all human beings are subject to this same ultimate moral standard. And that moral standard, God’s Law, God’s will for human beings in terms of what is right and wrong, is known in two ways. It is known naturally through general revelation of the will of God—also known as the unwritten law—and it is known scripturally through special revelation of the will of God that terminates in the written Word, the Bible. So there are two ways of knowing the moral law. It is known both naturally through general revelation, the unwritten law, and it is known scripturally through the special revelation of the will of God. That is a long process of oral communication that eventually gets embodied in writing. The full revelation is God

has spoken in His Son, and the apostolic witness to what Christ said and did is authoritative for us in the canon of the New Testament. So there is a twofold knowledge of the moral law. It is the same moral law that is known naturally and scripturally. That is my thesis. There is only one moral law, but it is known in two ways.

Let us move to the biblical basis for my thesis. The key text is Romans 2:14-15. We need to pick up a little bit of the context to understand this. Verse 10 says, "Glory, honor, and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek, for there is no partiality with God." And the opposite is the case for those "who are filled with selfish ambition, do not obey the truth, obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation." Verse 9 says, "tribulation and distress for everyone who does evil, Jew first and also for the Greeks." Okay, so you are dealing in this context with good and evil and its consequences in terms of the last judgment. In order to be held responsible in the last judgment, there must be some basis of knowing the difference between right and wrong. That is the point of verses 14-15. The pursuit of good or evil implies knowledge of the standard of right and wrong. Now this is how the verse reads. "When Gentiles, who do not have the law," that is, they do not have the scriptural revelation of the will of God; they do not have the written Torah. "When Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law," the things of the law. Paul does not say that they do the Law, but he says that they do things required by the Law. They do things that are objectively right. "Then they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the Scriptures." Even though they do not have the scriptural revelation of the will of God, "They show that the requirements of the Law," or the work of the Law, "are written on their hearts." It does not say that the Law is written on their hearts. That is language that is used for the work of the Holy Spirit in giving to us a new heart and writing God's laws on the heart, providing us with the incentive, the motivation, and the power to fulfill them, but they do show the work of the Law written on their hearts. "Their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts," The word there is *logisman*, their reasonings, "either accusing or excusing." We take that "reasonings" to be an individual thing, but I think it may be broader than that. This may be the reasonings with one another. What Paul is pointing to here are the moral judgments that human beings make of one another, either to accuse or excuse, on the basis of a common source of right and wrong. All human beings have some knowledge of right and wrong by virtue of their creation in the image of God. We all know, for example, that it is right to protect human life and wrong to destroy human life at will. It does not take a special revelation from God to tell us that. It is a principle deeply embedded in us, written on our heart, so to speak.

When Max Stackhouse took up his position as professor of systematic theology at Princeton Seminary, he gave an inaugural address that was really very good. Max Stackhouse has done a complete turnaround since the time when he was an advocate for socialism, and he is much more faithful to Scriptures throughout the whole of his ethic. In his inaugural address he made this point: "Deep in the recesses of our being, the traces of our divine origin are present. It is for this reason that all can note something of the difference between truth and falsehood, right and wrong, good and evil, even if we have not experienced all forms of them and cannot attain the true, the right, the good, the beautiful unaided. We can all know the basic principles of right and wrong." There is a biblical basis for moral knowledge outside of Scripture, and it is on the basis that human beings are held accountable before God.

So far I have avoided the term natural law because that term is so commonly used through the literature. Even with the Roman Catholic Church, there are a number of different theories of natural law. And of course with the advent of Darwinian evolutionism, nature has taken on kind of a normative thing and now you get these ideas, like some folks are even justifying rape as sort of a masculine trait that has arisen from our biology. It is horrendous.

So natural law has to be qualified. Here is the way in which I think we ought to define it. I get this from William Frankena, who taught at the University of Michigan and is out of the Christian Reformed background, so he is reliable in terms of his understanding of Christian ethics. “A person may be said to hold a natural law position.” Those are his words. I would put it this way: “A person may be said to hold natural knowledge of the moral law.” I think that is the way that we should think about it, that there is a natural knowledge of the moral law. But, “A person may be said to hold a natural law position who prescribes to moral principles such as equity, the right to life, liberty, and security, and who maintains” three things. Three things go into this idea of natural law—as I prefer it, natural knowledge of the moral law. One, “that we are justified in accepting them by truths known by our natural faculties.” Second, “that they justifiably ascribe rights and obligations to human beings as such” independently of offices, agreements, or whatever. Certain duties arise out of our offices, agreements, or duties. But these describe rights and obligations to human beings as such independent of those special obligations that we take on through contracts and so forth. And third, “that they may therefore serve as a standard by which to judge all human institutions, rules, and actions.” That is what we ought to mean by natural law, and it clearly has a biblical basis that all human beings have, not a perfect knowledge of the moral law, but a sufficient knowledge of the moral law in order for them to engage in moral deliberation and to be held accountable before God.

In one chapter of my book I discuss something of the historical development of the idea of natural law. I begin with Cicero in 50 BC and point out some of the formal ways in which he is in touch with truth, but also fault him for lack of a doctrine of creation. It is quite different when you conceive of natural law to have to learn what your destiny is from impersonal nature rather than from the will of your Creator. It was Augustine writing in about AD 400 who connected the natural law with the unwritten law of the Gentiles mentioned in Romans 2, and that is the natural law that is known by general revelation. Augustine sometimes adds that this has been obscured through sin, but the natural law is identified with the golden rule, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” and also the Decalogue, The Ten Commandments. That was common in the early church. The golden rule, Augustine said, is a basic moral norm that is known to all. We know it by virtue of our human constitution, and from this it is theoretically possible to derive the fundamental principles of morality. At the same time, given the pervasive effects of sin, our knowledge is at best limited, and for this reason God has given us the scriptural revelation of the will of God in order that we may have a more perfect knowledge of His Law. The scriptural revelation of the moral law is conditioned by our fallenness. It is because of our fallenness, and the self-serving approach that we have to corrupt the principles of right and wrong, that we have the clearer scriptural revelation of the will of God. We should notice, whereas it is obvious to us that natural knowledge of the moral law is imperfect and so we have to correct one another across cultures and so forth, that our scriptural knowledge of the moral law is also imperfect, although Scripture itself is infallible. Scripture itself is infallible, but we are always called forth to reexamine our interpretation of Scripture to make sure that we really have God’s will. We are still sinners, and even in the interpretation of Scripture we may be blinded by cultural influences and not interpret Scripture adequately. Although because of the propositional nature of Scripture, it ought to be more definitive, and we ought to be clearer in terms of it.

In the area of how to construe natural law, there is a great deal of ferment going on at the present moment. A book that I have grown to appreciate is by Gean Porter, called *Natural Law and Divine Law: Reclaiming the Tradition for Christian Ethics*. Porter is professor of ethics at Notre Dame, and the forward to this book is written by Nicholas Wolterstorff. Wolterstorff is out of the Reformed tradition, and is now professor of Philosophy at Yale. What he writes is encouraging to me. “What Professor Porter shows is that the medieval scholastics, rather than theorizing about natural law independently of

theology, embedded such theorizing firmly within their theology. They did indeed see ethics as grounded in the natural givens of human life, but their understanding of those natural givens was forthrightly based in Scripture and shaped by theological reflections.” That is what I was trying to show in my brief tracing of the historical development of natural law. We are sometimes surprised when we get to Gratian that he says the natural law is revealed in the Gospels. That is because there is only one moral law, and it is revealed both naturally and scripturally. To understand that the scholastics did not divorce themselves from their theological presuppositions when they came to interpret the natural law is an advance. It means that we are able to speak to the natural knowledge that people have. There is a significant point of contact in the understanding people have of right and wrong, which is clarified through the scriptural revelation. The import for Christian ethics is that “Christian morality is grounded in a theological interpretation of the natural givens of human life.” Those are Porter’s words. So that natural law provides a foundation for those moral precepts that are known naturally apart from divine revelation, but divine revelation clarifies the moral law. The importance of this, it seems to me, is that centuries after Christ, it is impossible to determine what truths we discern naturally and what we discern scripturally. You know, we had the scriptural revelation for going on 4000 years, from the time of Abraham. Or at least, let us say, from the time of Moses, 1440 BC to the present. That is 3500 years. That is a long time in which the scriptural revelation of the will of God has been in the world. It is impossible now at this point to set that all aside and just look at what we can naturally know of the moral law. But having the scriptural revelation and knowing there is a natural knowledge of the moral law gives us a point of contact.

Let me turn to the next point, which is to say something about the contemporary relevance of this approach. And I would put it this way. It is obvious I am still learning in this area. But I see a contemporary relevance here, that although virtue and character within Christian communities should be the main focus of Christian ethics—that is why I titled my book *Biblical Christian Ethics* and wrote primarily for the Christian community—we cannot neglect the common good of the wider human community. And in our pluralistic postmodern society, it is important that we articulate ethical issues in ways that are distinctively Christian but not exclusive; that is, that we endeavor to show how the scriptural revelation fulfills human nature. God’s commandments are for our good. That is the thesis at least that I would broach. I think that there are three components of social transformation. You may have seen these before. There is personal renewal. Through the preaching of the Gospel and through Christian discipleship, there is personal renewal. There is also ecclesial practice; that is, the church itself ought to be embodying the principles of authentic human nature. Then when we look at society, in terms of what God’s will is for society, there is structural reform that we should be participating in for the common good of society. What I am saying is that although we articulate a distinctive way of life that flows from our union with Christ, which we had the Word of God, the example of Christ, and the leading of the Holy Spirit to inform us in our Christian obedience, we can still speak to folks who are outside of that, and we have an important function to fulfill, enhancing the natural knowledge of the moral law.

In the November 1990 issue of *First Things*, there is an important article by Michael Novak. It carries the title “Human Dignity, Human Rights,” and it is his analysis of the work of Jacques Maritain, a Roman Catholic philosopher who after World War II was appointed to the committee to draw the UNESCO Charter in 1948. And the UNESCO Charter later became the basis for the universal declaration of human rights. Now, the United Nations at that time consisted of 60 nations. It is now more than double that, but it consisted at that time of 60 nations with radically opposed moral visions. How do you get a universal declaration of human rights from people who have radically opposed visions of the way things ought to be? Let me use a quote from Maritain that is cited in Novak. “How is an agreement conceivable among men assembled for the purpose of jointly accomplishing a task dealing with the future of the mind, who come from the four corners of the earth and who belong not only to different cultures and

civilizations, but to different spiritual families and antagonistic schools of thought?" How do you ever get a universal declaration of human rights? How are we to live together in this world? "Since the aim of UNESCO is a practical aim, agreement among its members can be spontaneously achieved, not on common speculative notions, but on common practical notions, not on the affirmation of the same conception of man, world, and knowledge, but on common practical notions. Not on the affirmation of the same set of convictions concerning theory, but on the affirmation of the same set of convictions concerning action. This is doubtless very little, it is the last refuge of intellectual agreement among men. It is, however, enough to undertake a great work; and it would mean a great deal to become aware of this body of common practical convictions." In other words, instead of trying to answer how our disparate intellectual positions can be reconciled, rather ask how we can, with these divergent epistemologies, reconcile these divergent visions of man and his place in the universe.

Maritain proposed asking, "How much agreement can we reach regarding practices even while remaining incurably divided regarding the underlying theory for such practices? Are there not some things so terrible in practice that no one will publicly approve of them? Are there not some things so good in practice that no one will not want to seem opposed to them?" We are never going to get any epistemological agreement. But let us look at the fact that we have a natural knowledge of the moral law. That is what he is saying, in effect. Do not try to impose scriptural revelation. Do not begin with Scripture, begin with the natural knowledge of the moral law, and you try to formulate it in thinking, "Are there not some things so terrible in practice that no one will publicly approve of them?" Now, they have just come through the Holocaust. "Are there not some things so good in practice that no one will not want to seem opposed to them?"

Here is the interesting thing. After 1975 with the Helsinki courts when the declaration was reiterated, human rights activists behind the iron curtain, even serious communists, were able to delegitimize the Soviet regime for failing to live up to this universal declaration of human rights. Even during that turbulent period, 1989 to 1991, it was that assertion of those practices that stemmed from a natural knowledge of the moral law embodied in a universal declaration of human rights. If you have not read it, it is a remarkable document. I will quote some of the issues that are still with us in terms of that. But it was an important statement across cultures, in spite of all the talk about relativism and so forth. Maritain knew that even people who deny the existence of the natural law cannot help exemplifying it, because they are human beings who use practical reasons every time they act. Now, this is why I suggest reading C. S. Lewis' *The Abolition of Man*, because it is so good on objective moral value, and in the appendix to this work he has eight categories in which he illustrates the "tao" or natural law. And those eight, beginning with the law of benevolence, then duties in various relationships, justice, good faith, mercy, magnanimity, and so forth, are a good summary drawn from across cultures and across history of a natural knowledge of the moral law. He is not trying to say that the authority of the moral law derives from this consensus. He says very rightly that for people who do not recognize the rationality of these principles, no consensus is going to persuade them of it either. He is appealing to something that is deeply embedded in human nature, and even though different societies may be more or less aware of it, there is a way to erect it from within.

I think that a similar argument has been made recently by Sisella Bok. I am not sure which Ivy League school she is now associated with, but she has written a number of important ethical treatises, one on lying and another one on secrets. This book that she wrote is *Common Values*, published by the University of Missouri Press, 1995. She makes the point also that "although agreement on foundations is out of reach, this need in no way precludes relying on a minimalist set of basic values as a starting point for cross cultural understanding, negotiation, and cooperation." She enumerates three categories of basic values, which she posits have been formulated in every society as necessary to collective survival. The

first category of basic value is positive duties of mutual support, loyalty, reciprocity (for example, with parents and children), encapsulated in the golden rule of putting oneself in the place of others. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." So first are those positive duties of support, loyalty, reciprocity, and the golden rule. Then, there are negative duties: to refrain from harmful action, from force and fraud, from violence and deceit. And third, she names positive norms of fairness and procedural justice, such as treating equal as what is equal and rejection of false witness in the course of a trial. Those are elementary norms of fairness. That is why we have them worldwide. It is why governments have sham trials in order to give the appearance of justice. It is why the enemies of Jesus paid false witnesses, to have the semblance of that kind of situation.

Those are minimalist values, but that shows the contemporary relevance of natural knowledge of the moral law. I think we should distinguish between Christian ethics and common morality. Common morality is something that is known naturally, but it can be enhanced by scriptural knowledge. Common morality as culturally conditioned human response to the moral law is subject to correction and development through an enhanced understanding of its own fundamental principles. Let me run that by you again. We are not saying that the knowledge of the natural law is perfect among all societies; it is more or less known. And some societies may have serious blind spots that need to be corrected, including our own. Common morality as culturally conditioned human response to the moral law is subject to correction and development through an enhanced understanding of its own fundamental principles. Slavery, segregation, apartheid, male supremacy, and other such culturally conditioned practices, when subjected to serious moral criticism, have failed the taotic test of equal justice. They fail the natural law test of equal justice. And I think we must add Christianity has often provided the impetus for such enhanced understanding, and it is wrong to take the results as innovative or sectarian on that account. Christianity has often provided the impetus for enhanced understanding of the moral law, but it is wrong to construe the results as innovative or sectarian on that account. C. S. Lewis makes this point in a vigorous paragraph on how the tao may be developed from within. He says, "There is a difference between a real moral advance and a mere intervention. From the Confucian, "do not do to others what you would not like them do to you" to the Christian "do as you would be done by" is a real advance. The morality of Nietzsche is a mere innovation. The first is an advance because no one who did not admit the validity of the old maxim could see the reason for accepting the new one, and anyone who accepted the old would at once recognize the new as an extension of the same principle. That is why regularly today you have the golden rule cited. Even in the character education movement in public institutions, the golden rule is cited. Often, as in Sissella Bok, it is simply mentioned as the golden rule, because it is recognized that that extends the principle that was formulated earlier in its negative form, the so-called silver rule. Lewis goes on, "If he rejected it, he would have to reject it as a superfluity, something that went too far, not as something simply heterogeneous from his own ideas of value. But the Nietzschean method can be accepted only if we are ready to scrap traditional morals as a mere error and then to put ourselves in a position where we can find no ground for any judgments at all. It is the difference between a man who says you like your vegetables moderately fresh, why do you not grow your own and have them perfectly fresh,"—and you can see the rationale; that is just an extension of the principle—"and the man who says throw away that loaf and try eating bricks and centipedes instead."

I think that the importance of this paragraph, and of not accepting the proposition that scripturally informed and religiously motivated positions on matters of public justice are sectarian and therefore illegitimate in a pluralistic society, is illustrated by the response of Peter Singer to the famous Baby Doe case. Peter Singer is now a professor at Princeton University. He is an Australian, but he has now been made professor in a prestigious position at Princeton University. He goes back as far as 1982 on this issue. This was the Baby Doe case. In a hospital in Bloomington, Indiana, a child born with Down Syndrome and a deformed esophagus was allowed to die of starvation and dehydration. The esophagus

could have been corrected by routine surgery, but the parents decided against such treatment. They did not want a retarded child, though it is impossible to predict the degree of retardation early on in Down Syndrome cases anyway. But they would not approve the operation, so Baby Doe died. If the child had not had Down Syndrome, the esophagus blockage would have been routinely treated. Now, following the publicity of the Baby Doe case, President Reagan ordered the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services to apply Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 to handicapped infants. America had passed the law against discrimination against the handicapped in 1973. Reagan ordered the application of that to handicapped infants. This was rightly perceived to be discrimination against a Down Syndrome baby, a handicapped baby. That act prohibits discrimination against the handicapped under any program receiving federal aid. The executive order was then contested in the courts. This always happens. And finally the Second Circuit Court of Appeals decided two to one against the administration, saying this law does not apply. Congress then amended the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act to make explicit that “withholding a medically indicated treatment from disabled infants with life threatening conditions is included in the definition of child abuse and neglect.” Now, it was Singer who argued against that, and this is the way he argued. “Society cannot coherently hold that it is all right to kill a fetus a week before birth but as soon as the baby is born everything must be done to keep it alive.” That happens to be true. That is an incoherent position. But Singer’s solution was to abandon the idea that all human life is of equal worth. Try bricks and centipedes instead. This is an innovative reality that breaks with our natural knowledge of the moral law. But the reasoning that Singer proposed is that “the belief of the equal worth of all human life is a particular Christian conviction that is not shared by all participants in American public life.” In other words, this is a sectarian position. You are imposing your religious view on everyone; it is sectarian. Now, Singer goes beyond that today and he advocates that the decision whether to kill a born infant can be made up until the 28th day after birth. It is not exactly clear why 28 days is the cut-off period, but that is his argument now. He does advocate infanticide. He is arguing that to oppose infanticide is sectarian.

Let us try to argue this out. When Christianity came into the Hellenistic world, infanticide, that is, allowing unwanted infants to die by exposure, was common practice. And Christians often would find these babies left to die and would take them, adopt them, and raise them as Christian children. Eventually, the equal value of human life won the day in terms of public policy. The way that was argued was not a sectarian basis, but Christianity helped people to see that this is inconsistent with what we know naturally about the moral law with respect to human life. Human life ought not to be abandoned at will and ought not to be taken at will. So it was a Christian illumination and extension of the understanding of the moral law that led to a change in practice. So I would say that Christian conviction took the common regard for human life to a more consistent and higher level, whereas the solution proposed by Singer is radically innovative. The real sectarians are those who call society to abandon its well-developed common convictions and impose their convictions instead.

There is a more recent book, published by Singer in 1994, called *Rethinking Life and Death*, in which he has a number of specific examples. The subtitle to the book is *The Collapse of our Traditional Ethics*. Here are some examples of the traditional ethic and what he would say is the new ethic we ought to adopt. On traditional ethic: “Treat all human life as of equal worth.” For that, he would substitute “Recognize that the worth of human life varies.” And so the strong obligation to care for human life is supplanted by recognizing human life varies. Here is another one. “Never intentionally take human life” is the traditional morality. The principle he would substitute is “take responsibility for the consequences of your decisions,” which implies, the way he puts that, that sometimes if you take responsibility you may put to death innocent human life. Traditional morality teaches “never take your own life and always try to prevent others from taking theirs.” The new ethic he proposes is “Respect a person’s desire to live or die.” Okay, so when a man or woman is poised on the bridge, you do not try to persuade them not to

jump. You respect them, you know. The elementary protection of human life is supplanted by this new theory. Fourth, “Treat all human life as always more precious than non-human life.” That is traditional morality. What he offers as a new ethic is “do not discriminate on the basis of species.” He is very radical as an animal rights activist. Now, you see what has happened is that he is trying to say that all these positions—strong protection of the innocent human life, regarding human beings of equal worth, regarding man as higher than the animals—derive from a Christian world and life view, and therefore, they are sectarian, and therefore we cannot argue them. We cannot have a religiously informed authority in our pluralistic society. But, of course, what he offers derives from a worldview that is equally imposing of values on others. At some point, we have to decide.

The Christian case is made that scriptural revelation of the moral law illuminates what we already know about the moral law naturally. It is the same law. And we ought to be able to show how it leads people further into the truth of what is good for human beings and what enhances human life rather than destroys it.