

Tough Questions for ‘Evangelicals’

*“Brace yourself like a man;
I will question you, and you shall answer me.
“Would you discredit my justice?
Would you condemn me to justify yourself? [Job 40:7&8]*

I read several years ago that it was John Wesley’s frequent practice to visit a new town and there publish the Ten Commandments. Whether he did this orally or in writing I cannot recall. Probably he did both. He would then leave the village for a few weeks, (often pelted with wood and stones) and pray that God’s Spirit would do a deep work of conviction. So, after a few weeks had passed, he would re-visit the town and proclaim publicly with much rigor the good news of the gospel, etc. The folks were now duly prepared to hear about God’s mercy and grace in Christ.

I drafted the following questions to try to engage fellow Christians whose outlook is suffocatingly ‘pietistic’. Here’s my own answers:

1. Why is the evangelical church so marginalised?

It is marginalised because it has abandoned its (high) calling from God to exercise a prophetic ministry, holding the other two spheres - State & Family - to account. The Church is supposed to be salt and light safeguarding the culture within which it finds itself from moral corruption and gradually sanctifying all its institutions.

2. Who cares what evangelicals think?

No one cares today what they think! Having abandoned their prophetic calling they are merely now just one other voice vying for a place at the table in the discourse that prevails in the public square. Don’t kid yourself into believing it was always this way. Read a little history. God’s truest saints contended for biblical truth in the public square! Calvin was anxious to create a godly society in Geneva; Knox in Scotland likewise engaged the civil authorities with their need to legislate accordance with God’s Law.

3. Why are so many evangelicals unable to talk intelligently about politics?

Alas, the thinking ones have been coaxed into thinking that the enterprise of politics & statecraft is somehow inherently worldly; they have unwittingly become so heavenly minded they are of no earthly good! Theirs is a religion of escapism & easy-believism. They have swallowed the subtle, paralysing notion that this earth is destined to burn up (as per 2 Peter 3) and that the Church is to be rescued from the wreckage and whisked away to ‘heaven’. Therefore, they reason, ‘why polish brass on a sinking ship?’

4. Why are so many evangelicals indifferent about ‘Christian education?’

It is because they have been sold a narrow/diluted version of Christianity which merely offers them soul-salvation. In reality, Christianity is a world-and-life-view! There is a

Christian way of thinking about everything. Paul exhorts us to bring every thought captive to the word of God (2Cor 10:4) & to glorify God in all that we do (1Cor 10:31). Until one is willing to acknowledge that there is no neutral ground out there, the children will grow up schizophrenic - believing religious stuff on Sunday mornings and natural/neutral truth through the week.

5. Does the Bible address Politics?

Yes, of course. To believe otherwise is to suppose that God created Adam & Eve to remain alone & isolated on the earth. Politics concerns how we're to live corporately together. Ninety percent of the Bible addresses politics. So why do so many Christians fail to see it? Because they've been bewitched by false shepherds & preachers who present their own autonomous opinions instead of God's word. God has given us in Scripture a blueprint for building Christian civilisation. Unsurprisingly, he has ordained three distinct social spheres - Church, Family & State - each with its own ordinances. The Law of God addresses all three. God's kingdom includes all three operating coherently & collaboratively with one another. Pietism results when Christianity is apprehended as merely relevant to the Church or individual. It gives rise to 'churchianity'. Many Christians seek to apply Scriptural principles to their families. This is commendable! But few think to apply God's Law to the civil realm. In abstracting God and Scripture from 'politics' they end up with truncated gospel that merely seeks appeasement with the culture instead of the subjugation of it in accordance with the great commission (Matt 28) and the dominion mandate of Gen 1:28.

6. Does the Bible have anything to say about Science?

The scientific enterprise concerns metaphysics - the nature of reality. Does Scripture address this? Yes, of course! It tells us God made (supernaturally) the universe recently by speaking (*fiat*). It tells us he ordains all that comes to pass & executes His sovereign will through secondary causes (your choices, the laws of Physics & Chemistry, etc). It tells us that it was made 'very good' but fell as a result of Adam's sin; it tells us that the earth was destroyed by a catastrophic global flood around 4500 years ago; it tells us that it is now subject to death and decay (Rom 8:20-21) until the time of restoration of all things (Acts 3:21); it tells us that humanity is made in God's image and that his vocation in time is to subjugate the earth to God's glory;. Science is pertinent to this vocation. Moreover, Scripture provides us with a warrant for the principle of induction (that the future will be like the past) which is foundational to procedural science. Most crucially of all, it tells us of our tendency, as fallen creatures, to suppress the truth in unrighteousness (Rom 1:18) and of our need for the lens of Scripture to correct our naturally 'jaundiced' outlook by seeing everything around us in His light (Ps 36:9).

7. Is theistic evolution a principled position to take on cosmic origins?

No it isn't! It represents the folly of capitulating to naturalism - i.e. belief that natural processes must somehow account for the complexities of living systems apart from special creation. It denies the truthfulness of God's written testimony of Earth history

as we read it in Scripture; finally, it kow-tows to man's folly in imagining that 'mainstream evolutionism' & darwinism have somehow unearthed an objective account of past processes.

8. Is crime the same as sin? What's the difference?

No, crime is a sub-category of sin. All (biblical) crime is sin, but not all sin is crime. An example of crime is murder; but covetousness is not a crime. Only when it leads to theft or adultery is it elevated in gravity to crime.

9. Did Jesus die for our crimes?

Yes and no! The thief on the cross had committed a crime worthy of death & yet Jesus assured him that he would be with Him that day in paradise. Both his sins & his crimes had been forgiven by God. A converted Christian knows that judicially ALL his sins have been forgiven. And yet it is God's most holy will that the civil magistrate executes God's wrath upon the criminal within a society (Rom 13). Therefore, within the heavenly sphere all sin & crime is paid for by Christ; but in the earthly sphere, crimes are to receive their proper (ordinate) sanction - either slavery, death or restitution, etc. Notice how ridiculous it sounds if a Christian, caught speeding, turns to the officer and declares, "It's OK for me; Jesus died for my sins - He paid my fine!" The thief on the cross was forgiven all his sins; but his own death on the cross was God's ordained payment for his crime!

10. Does the Bible identify crimes? Give examples.

Yes, the Law of God is much concerned with the various classes of sins and crimes. Alas, it is necessary to 'rightly divide the Word of God' when we are thinking about the various classifications, but Jesus Himself hints that there are weightier aspects of God's Law (e.g. probably capital crimes) and lighter aspects (e.g. tithing the mint & cumin). Capital crimes that God, through Moses, identifies include: murder, kidnapping, rape and even the persistent defiance of a rebellious adolescent! (see Matt 15:4)

11. Does the Bible tell us what the penalties are (should be) for different crimes?

Again, yes! For example, consider monetary damages and fines.

These are frequently mentioned for non-capital offenses. Sometimes the amount to be paid to the injured party is well in excess of the damage itself, as in the case of stolen property. If the stolen animal was recovered alive, then the thief had to pay only double damages; but if he had killed it or sold it, he had to restore fourfold (Ex 22:1-4). Or again, if a man falsely accused his bride of unchastity prior to marriage, he was not only subjected to public scourging, but he also had to pay back to his father-in-law the entire dowry of fifty shekels, plus fifty more (Deut 22:18, 19). Furthermore, he had to keep his slandered wife and never divorce her.... In the case of a death from goring by a vicious bull, the surviving family was to be paid whatever they considered to be fair in the light of the circumstances (Ex 21:30)—unless the bull had not previously been known to its owner to be dangerous.ⁱ

12. **Do you agree with capital punishment?**
You should! It's plainly taught in Scripture in both the OT (e.g. Gen 9:6) and the NT (e.g. Rom 13:1 & Rom 1:32)
13. **Is capital punishment Biblical? Does God sanction capital punishment?**
We have just seen that it is! There should therefore be no discussion nor controversy. But there is!! I have known lots of Christians who, due to the failure of the pulpit over many years, fail to comprehend the will of God regarding jurisprudence within the community.
14. **What crimes do you consider worthy of a capital sentence?**
YOU should identify the same crimes which God identifies as worthy of a capital sanction. According to the Westminster Confession, the formal particulars (e.g. stoning) are not binding upon any society but rather the 'general equity' of God's Law. Accordingly, the exact method of execution might be discretionary. There did appear, however, to be some preferment for it to take place publicly.
15. **What crimes does God say are worthy of a capital sentence?**
Here's a few: Idolatry (Exodus 22:20); infant sacrifice (Lev 20:2); witchcraft, divination and spiritualism (Ex 22:18); blasphemy (Lev 24:11-23); false prophecy consisted either in prophesying in the name of some false god, or in pretending to speak in the name of God when in point of fact no message from the Lord had been received. In either case the penalty was death (Deut 18:20-22); Sabbath-breaking (Ex 31:13).
16. **Is God wrong to attach capital sanctions to certain crimes?**
It is God as Creator who determines right & wrong, not we His creatures. Isaiah tells us, *"To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."* (Is 8:20). Therefore, no it is not wrong for God to allocate capital sanctions to certain crimes. Samuel Rutherford's famous treatise on English Law - *Lex Rex* - can be simply summarised: 'that is a crime which God says is a crime; that is the due penalty for a crime which God says is the due penalty.'
17. **Does your Christianity allow you to disagree with God? Is Jesus Lord?**
Wow, can you believe I'm having to ask such a question??
18. **How do most Christians avoid these sorts of questions?**
First of all, they surrender their thinking capacity by assuming that they've substantially complied with God's will by merely attending an evangelical church every week. Second, they wistfully imagine that the weekly preached message represents a satisfactory account of what we're supposed to believe & practise. Third, they quietly give up on independent reading and study. Fourth, they quickly sense that addressing these sorts of questions fairly & honourably might involve them in a measure of perceived radicalism. They prefer to remain in their comfort zone, therefore they suppress the truth in unrighteousness & leave it where it is - 'on the back burner' - for a more convenient season of life. Occasionally, they might decide to go trawling online for a substantial answer to their disquiet by googling something like 'Theonomy

refuted' and settling for the first half-baked appraisal they come across. Straw men arguments against Christian Reconstruction abound on the web.

19. Have you ever heard a sermon recommending God's capital sanctions for the civil State?

I haven't in nearly forty years of following Christ!

20. Does the Bible tell us unequivocally what's right and wrong?

You bet! Do you honestly think that God might leave such weighty & important matters up for arbitrary grabs?? The Bible is positively full to overflowing with moral instruction. Alas, there are hoards of folk who simply cannot see the wood for the trees. Most often, it's not the academic aspect that's difficult or lacking; rather, it's the moral courage to grasp the nettle! "A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still."

21. Do you know what true justice looks like? How would you measure/calibrate it?

The word 'justice' in Scripture is apparently the same as the word 'righteousness'. The Scriptures are the lens through which we appraise all things. The psalmists enjoins us to embrace Scripture as God's lamp-stand. He says, 'in Your light we see light' (Ps 36:9). It was Cornelius Van Til who coined the term 'Theonomy' contrasting it with autonomy - the only other alternative point of view!

22. Why are evangelicals disinterested in Biblical justice?

They are disinterested in Biblical justice because they have learned - by osmosis over years & years - to think GENERALLY in terms of PERSONAL SANCTIFICATION. They have learned to read their Bibles through PIETISTIC glasses comprehending the text merely in terms of private (or Church related) holiness and not corporate SOCIO-POLITICAL righteousness. The latter is of course also much less straightforward and requires a more careful hermeneutic that recognises the distinct spheres of human experience - Church, family & state. They tend to relegate any sort of consideration of socio-political righteousness to the OT dispensation where they perceive God's dealings with His ancient people somehow confused or conflated functions the responsibilities of Church & State. Moreover, they tend to suppose that the civil magistrate operating today in the civil sphere is ruled & constrained not by God's Law (as revealed in Scripture) but rather by 'natural law' which they associate with common grace pertinent only in a sort of 'lower-storey' parallel universe which they associate with the 'earthly domain' in contrast with the more spiritual (unseen & ephemeral 'upper-storey') domain of God's actual kingdom where Christ is presently reigning & ruling. You don't get it? Just keep smiling & - along with them - just pretend that you do!

23. Do you think God cares about our indifference to Biblical standards of justice?

Once again, you bet! Throughout the OT the various countries and nations are indicted by the prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah & Ezekiel, etc) for their neglect of God's Laws and His commandments. It was especially the neglect of civil laws that God threatened judgement (destruction, captivity or dispersion); His complaint was that they sought to be faultless in the execution of their religious observances (temple worship, sacrificers,

etc) whilst simultaneously neglecting the orphan, the stranger & the widow, etc. Isaiah 58 spells this out!

24. What, according to Scripture, is God's response to a people/society that disregards true justice and pursues its own preferred version of justice?

Are you sitting down? This brings us to the actual 'rub'! God in Scripture castigates & indicts ALL COMMUNITIES that disdain the precepts of His holy Law. They are first warned, then severely judged by wars, famines, earthquakes, pestilences, captivity, civil strife & same-sex relationships, etc. Our own nation is plainly under such judgement right now. Perhaps you and your Church are. We have abandoned the Christian legacy of our parliamentary democracy in which checks and balances deterred the executive authority of its various parts exercising tyrannical power. The Church has abandoned its prophetic ministry of calling to account the civil legislature for its promotion of godless policies and has become irrelevant in the public psyche. The Christian Churches have, moreover, given up their high calling to be united on the Word of God; having abandoned a quest for principled ecumenism, they have settled for carnality, sectarianism & antinomianism, etc. They are salt that has lost its saltiness & light that has been hidden under a barrel. They therefore likewise have been largely cast off before the Lord; worst of all, for the most part, those in attendance blithely accept this status quo and seem to want nothing more. The words of Jeremiah ring out with pertinence: *'the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule on their own authority; and My people love it so! But what will you do at the end of it? (Jer 5:31)*

25. What name is given to the absence of justice?

Injustice!

26. What does the Bible say about societies that suffer injustice?

As we have just seen, they must implode & suffer divine retribution, trouble & judgement according to the terms of God's covenant. God is FAITHFUL to His word. There can be no neutrality, no sitting on the fence. Either you will publicly uphold God's prescribed description of justice or you will find yourself advocating for some version of humanism. Resistance is futile; the final vindication of God's Law & Christ's rule & reign throughout the world is inevitable. Only one question remains: who's side are you fighting on?

27. What responsibility do you have to inform fellow believers about justice/injustice?

Jesus was explicit about the permanence of the Mosaic Law code: *'Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven (Matt 5:18ff)'*. You should think of the great deposit of God's Law in Scripture as a pearl of great price. We're told of Christ in Isaiah *'He will not fail nor be discouraged, till He has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands*

shall wait for His law' (42:4). They're still waiting. The discipling of the nations is central to the Great Commission. That instruction was to be declared & proclaimed to every nation, tribe & tongue under heaven. You therefore are like a servant to whom God has given several talents. You need to invest your time & energy effectively in advancing the cause of Christ's kingdom as 'ruler of the kings of the earth' (Rev 1:5). Alas, many choose to bury their talents beneath the ground and vainly imagine they will escape judgement.

28. Does the Bible indicate that the second coming of Jesus is imminent?

No! Those - and there are many - who think it is are under a delusion. They have unwittingly conflated numerous references in Scripture to AD70 (the destruction of Jerusalem) with the end of the cosmos. Matthew 24 (Luke 21 & Mark 13) - the Olivet discourse - is a fine example. Old testament prophecies abound which link the first advent of Christ with both salvation AND judgement. The death & resurrection of Christ addressed the former; the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 - and the dispersal of the Jews from Israel by the armies of Rome - was the fulfilment of the latter.

29. How have Christians historically sought to transform the culture?

This final question warrants a much fuller response that I can supply here. For the details read R Rushdoony, G North & G Bahnsen. The Lord's prayer, however, provides the most compelling justification for Christians to be engaged in this battle. Consider its petitions, *'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come; Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.'* (Matt 6:9-13)

Historically, the puritans & reformers sought to reform not just the Church but whole communities. In any doubt? Check out Nick Needham's two lectures on Calvin's Geneva. Needham is no friend of Christian Reconstruction but he cannot so easily deny the historical factuality!

The twin doctrines of 'Interposition' and 'The Lesser Magistrate' have been tragically forgotten by evangelicals. These have been helpfully recovered & summarily explained recently by Matthew Trewhella. Check him out. Essentially these important doctrines, exemplified throughout Scripture and history teach us that 'defying tyrants is obedience to God!'

ⁱ Bible Gateway – Encyclopedia of the Bible