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## How Can We Determine Which Christian Moral Principles Should Be Made into Laws?

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### #STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about how to determine which Christian moral principles should be made into laws and which shouldn't and why Christ suffered a temporary punishment delivered by man while he was alive if the punishment for man's sin is eternal and delivered by God after death.

\* Is there a clear principle that can be used to determine which Christian moral principles should be made into laws and which ones should be left out of the law?

\* If the punishment for man's sin is eternal and delivered by God after death, why was the punishment Christ suffered temporary and delivered by man while he still lived?

### Transcript

#STRask How Can We Determine Which Christian Moral Principles Should Be Made into Laws? Welcome to Stand to Reason's #STRask podcast. This is Amy Hall and I'm here with Greg Koukl and we're here to answer your questions that you send on Twitter with the #STRask. So Greg, are you ready for the first question? Alright, well in the last episode we touched on the idea of law and when we were talking about women being able to drive in the carpool lane when they're pregnant.

Oh yeah, whether yes, okay. So here's another... Stupid California law. I don't think it's legal here but I haven't double checked that so we'll just let that go.

It doesn't matter. Well, so people know what we're talking about. In the carpool lane, if you have two people, then our pregnant women do they qualify? And so we...yes, there's two people but in my view it didn't matter because the second person is not a driver.

Anyway. Alright, so here is another question about law. This one comes from Timothy.

Is there a clear principle that can be used to know which Christian ethics one should strive to be made into laws and which ones should be left out of the law? Well, I don't

know classically if kind of these details have been worked out. I suspect to sub-degree they have but I'll tell you what comes to mind. And that is the common good.

The reason that we have a legal system is to promote, to use the language of the Constitution, the general welfare, I guess is the way they put it in the preamble of the Constitution. Well, there the general welfare is synonymous with the common good. We are trying to use a system of law that is meant to promote human flourishing in the broad sense the common good.

And so one, I think this can be a guideline. And by the way, there are going to be differences of opinion even on that but it's a place to start it seems to me. This is going to be a guideline.

Is this thing that we're enacting into law really meant to serve the common good or is it meant to serve a parochial interest, that is the interest of a smaller group of people? And particularly at the expense of the common good. So, I mean, that's the kind of principle that I think of right now. And the notion of how the law ought to be used even for that purpose is going to shift depending on an individual's political philosophy.

So, the common good might be viewed as individual liberty. So, individuals get the liberty to pursue their own life and to set their own goals and kind of build their own utopia, so to speak, for themselves, according to their within boundaries, of course, but according to their particular interests and desires and views. So, that would be a political philosophy that emphasizes more individual liberty, which is the principle that was grounded that our own American experiment was grounded in, at least in part.

Or you have a collectivist view. What will promote the good of everybody as a collective whole? Now, that's a much more leftist perspective. Okay.

And this is the concern that you have in communist countries. It's not the individual. It's the collective.

And the government then is going to build a utopia for the collective, but that is based on what the individuals in the government understand utopia to look like. So, one's conviction that you use ethical principles in law for promoting the common good is going to be dependent on your understanding of what the common good looks like. And so, and that's going to be rooted in larger worldview issues and a deeper understanding or a particular understanding of what it means to be human.

So, as a follower of Christ, I'm looking at the ethics of the Bible as God's way as the designer of everything, of accomplishing him and flourishing. And so, I am going to be looking for those kinds of things that are best for the society in particular more individual liberty, as opposed to collectivist mentality, which I think leads to abusive policies and violation of individual liberties. And how any particular Christian ethic is going to relate

to that.

So, but if somebody who's way over on the political left who sees the world in Marxist terms and sees not equality of what's the right language here of where you start, so to speak, as opposed to equality of the world. And so, as opposed to equality of outcome, yeah, so American project was let's all have kind of an even playing field as much as possible so that we can move forward at our own speeds according to our desires. That's one sense of equality.

Another sense of equality is not a quality of opportunity, but an equality of outcome. Everybody's got a little land at the same place, and that's Marxist. So, that's going to dictate different policies and different, now I'm pausing here and even actually physically doing scare quotes around different ethics.

And the reason I'm doing that is because the political left has no actual grounds for ethics since they tend to be non-theistic in their convictions and individualistic in their desires. So, it's ironic because they campaign for individual liberty. Maybe I'm getting off topic a little bit, I'll just make this observation.

They campaign for individual liberties. I want to do what I want. You do you, you know, expressive individualism.

We talked about this before, but politically they're collectivists, you know, they're using political power to force a point of view and a way of doing business on everybody and more and more aggressively as time goes on. But anyway, so the answer is vague or I have a formal principle, okay? You, ethics and enforce certain parochial ethics, so-called Christian ethics, for the common good, but those terms in a material fashion are going to work out in very different ways depending on your political philosophy. Does that make sense? Yeah, and I think what you said is true.

I think people have thought about this probably a lot more than we have because that's their field. So, people can look into this more, but I want to add that, you know, if you're looking for a principle of which should be made into laws and which ones should not be made into laws, I think one simple distinction here could be the type of laws at the beginning of the 10 commandments versus the type of laws at the end. So, the first four laws are all about worship.

They're about how to worship God. They're about worshipping God above all other gods. And the last six are about relationships in society so that you can have a just society.

So, those are, I think that's the important distinction to start with. We are not going to pass laws about how you should worship God. That is, that's not the role, that's not, that's not even possible in our country.

Now, with the Old Testament, obviously that was the purpose of their country. God was

supposed to be their sovereign, so that was a different situation, but in our country that's not how it works. So, we are not going to pass laws about how to worship.

But the other laws about basic parts of morality, of justice, of not harming people, of just the whole moral system. I don't think there's anything wrong with people voting for what they believe to be right and wrong. In fact, that's what everyone does.

And there's no neutral moral worldview. So, if it's wrong for Christians to vote according to their understanding of morality, then it's also wrong for people who are atheist to vote according to their understanding of morality. And the fact is, it's not wrong.

That's what every single law is, is an expression of morality. I mean, for the most part, unless it's a random thing like which side of the road the car is going to drive on. No, but even that is a mental organizing society for the safety of the individuals, for the common good.

Sure, but whether it's on the right side or the left side. That's right, but what, the right on that particular. So, so every law is, is supporting an idea of morality.

So there's nothing wrong with Christians as citizens in this country to express that. Now, there's also the question. So, so we have the question of the type of law, whether it's a law about worship or a law about societal relationships and contracts and that sort of thing.

But there's also a question of the extent of the law because we don't outlaw certain things like lying. It's not unless it's in terms of perjury in a court case. Right.

So there's a, there's a level of seriousness that is legislated against, but we don't have a utopian view where we can stamp out all sin. And I think we, we kind of have a sense for that. I don't know what the exact principle would be here, but the more you try to create a utopia and stamp out all sin, the greater the intrusion of the government.

So there is a point where we're not going to legislate aspects of morality. So that's right, because then you end up intervening with, I'm sorry, contravening personal liberties, which itself is a moral harm and creates moral harms. So this is where as the law gets too intrusive, it creates problems, moral problems in that.

And so even your definition or your sense of how intrusive the law should be is going to be informed by your own kind of moral sensibility. Mark said from each according to his ability to each according to his need. So that's kind of a more historical way of saying that rich should pay their fair share kind of thing.

But notice that that's all coming from an ethic from Marxism. So there's no way to ground the goodness of that in a certain sense, because it's an atheistic system Marxism. Nevertheless, it is an ethical viewpoint that they're trying to impose on the rest

of the world.

And but that is going to interfere significantly with personal liberty. And that's what we've seen. And it tells by nature.

And so that's going to create another kind of harm in society. So you just can't get away from these ethical concerns no matter how you choose to use power. So the bigger the concern, the more gravity of it, you can.

Yeah, the more gravity of it, for example, murder would be an example of that. That's the reason why we should legislate against it. And then as you move towards the the the sins that cause less damage, doesn't make them not sins.

God is still going to judge us for it. But if the government's not in a place to judge certain things about our hearts or certain motivations or whatever that is. That's the problem with hate crime, by the way, but that's another issue.

So that's a thought crime. Yeah. Anyway, so with something like abortion, then obviously that if it's murdering an innocent human being, that is a major concern that it's very legitimate to legislate against.

And by the way, that that is not a it's not a Christian ethic. It is a human ethic. Right.

You know, it isn't parochial. It isn't like, Oh, well, how do you baptize the adept or sprinkle? This is about a basic human need. And this is why, regardless of religion, civil laws protect human beings because they are convinced that human beings are kind of beings that ought to be protected in a way that other animals are not protected.

Okay. And the question here is whether the child, the unborn child is an example of one of those valuable human beings. Okay.

And it's not a religious issue, though. This is the way it's made to be. It's no more religious than it being wrong to murder, to commit homicide.

I think that's a great point, Greg. That is not something peculiar to Christianity. It's a publicly accessible moral principle that we accept in many other cases.

You're just applying it to every human being. And of course, some would object that they don't think every human being should have protection. Some outright will say that.

And I've had atheists say that to me. So that's where we have to make our argument and we have to convince people that this is actually true about reality that we ought to be doing this. Right.

By the way, you said something of people, and we both made reference to people, have kind of thought through this. I think it's in the Christian tradition that most of the careful

thinking has been done. Because there's a real concerted effort to try to make one's public policy and public life and understanding of the role of the use of power by the government conform to an objective external standard.

God's standard. This is where just war theory comes in. That is all tied to transcendent morality.

Where does transcendent morality inform policy? But if you don't believe a transcendent morality, something else is going to be informing it. And so from an atheistic worldview or a naturalistic world or a de facto atheistic worldview, people may not be entirely atheist, but they function as if they were. Then there's a whole other thing that's informing it.

And a lot of it is just self-interest. A massive amount of self-interest. And that's why the appeal is made.

Five politicians regarding some of these things merely to self-interest and not to any deeper ethical principles. So I think when we survey the field of the careful thinking that's been done to try to answer this question of how do we integrate ethics properly into policy. That thinking is principally done by people of spiritual conviction, especially theistic people, especially Christian theists.

And you're not going to get that kind of depth from the secular world. They're guided by something entirely different. Okay, let's go on to another question, Greg.

And this one we do get from time to time in various forms, but since it does come up a lot, I do revisit it every once in a while. So this one comes from Nirkish. In the story of reality, Greg said that Christ was enduring the punishment for man sin.

How can that be if the punishment for man sin is eternal and delivered by God after our death? Why is the punishment Christ suffers temporary and delivered by man while he still lives? Well, this is a really fair question, and it's one I ask myself, but it's also one I think that I answer in the story of reality. And this is, it goes back to the famous line from Anselm, "Why the God Man, Carduce Homo." And that is, there is a reason why God became man. And some are obvious, you know, Jesus came to reveal the Father, you know, the Son is incarnate, the Word incarnate to reveal the Father, John chapter 1. But there is a calculus to this whole issue.

Human beings are the debtors, and so humans need to pay. Here's the rationale. Yet a mere human cannot pay because he's not, one human, ordinary human can't pay for all humans.

Plus, all normal, ordinary humans have their own debts. So that's a problem. This is why there's a slavery concern, and if this isn't resolved adequately in a sense, according to God's bookkeeping, then humans are going to pay their own debt, and that will take

forever, okay? Eternal separation from God.

So who is, what kind of man is capable of taking the punishment for, not just for one person, but for multitudes, which if they paid it would take them forever to pay it? Well, the only kind of man that could accomplish this is someone who's not a mere man, but rather God in human flesh. Now, some of you might say, well, how does that calculus work? And my answer is, I don't know. We don't know that.

But we do know the need for a substitute that is a human. There's a kinship/redeemer kind of relationship there, but at the same time can't be just a mere man. It's got to be something, someone who can take the full force of the wrath of God against sin.

And so when the Scripture says that Jesus died for all men, or He paid the penalty for all men, etc., or God's wrath was propitiated, the point there is that because of His divine nature, something about the nature of that transaction allows Him to suffer in a qualitative way that is adequate to cover every sin of every human being who ever lived. Now, that doesn't mean it's applied to everybody. It's only applied to those who satisfy the conditions and that is faith in Christ.

So in one sense, the work of Christ is for all men, inadequate to all men because you have the divine Son of God who is receiving the wrath of God, the first person, I'm sorry, the second person is receiving the anger by the first person, and satisfying the propitiating the wrath of God. But at the same time, there's an adequacy of that, but it isn't applied universally. It's applied individually.

And it was only intended to be applied individually. I don't know why there's any debate about that. God did not intend the sacrifice of Christ to go to anyone who did not fulfill the requirement.

Now, this is often called limited atonement or particular atonement, but I was an Arminian, which I'm not. I still believe in that. Now, there was God intended, the work of Christ, only to apply to those people who qualified for it, which is faith in Christ.

And so to me, it's like the highway system. The highway system is for everybody, but not everybody drives on the highway. It's available for those to take advantage of it, but it only benefits those who do take advantage of it in the proper way.

So those are statements that are very theologically general. It doesn't commit one to any particular view of salvation like Arminian or Reformed, but it does commit you to an understanding that there is a substitutionary atonement made by Jesus, but that's built into the question. So it takes a God-man to accomplish that task.

And what's interesting to me is that it makes sense then of the statement for God, so love the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever should believe in him would not perish but have everlasting life. If God just took a man and punished a man for

everybody else's sins, and the man did receive the punishment willingly, that would be an evidence of the man's love. It wouldn't be an evidence of God's love because it's the man who suffered.

But if the man who suffered actually is God, who takes the wrath of the Father, then it is an example of God's love that God himself would take the punishment for man's sin. And so it's only the God-man that is capable of accomplishing this magnificent and also magnanimous task of salvation. So his two concerns here that it's not eternal, which you explained because he's an eternal being and his value will pay for that.

His other concern about the punishment being delivered by man, you also address, but maybe not as explicitly. So just to sum up, God is pouring out his wrath on Jesus. So while men are crucifying Christ, he's still suffering the punishment of God.

That's right. Well, it was during the crucifixion and darkness covered Calvary for those three hours that the Father was pouring his wrath out on Jesus. And I think that the darkness covering Calvary was not symbolic.

I mean, it was symbolic. It was actual, but it was symbolized. There's a cloak of darkness over the sun and this is Jesus Christ out, Eliele Lamas-Labakthani.

This Aramic phrase, "Why have you forsaken me?" And of course, we know what that means. It's not a mystery. It's from Psalm 22.

The next line is, "Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning." In other words, he's being punished and he knows why he's being punished. He has given his life for others. It's a sacrificial death, a substitute for others.

And he knows this. He's talked about this. John the Baptist says, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." So this is not a secret.

But it's the agony of a man, the God man, receiving this unfathomable punishment. It's a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God. He did by choice and he's crying out in that regard.

He's not mystified. He's not doubting. He's in agony.

This is why he says what he says there on the cross. But that's when he's receiving the wrath of God. I don't know how much the punishment or the suffering that Jesus received at the hands of men is part of that broader equation.

I don't know. Everybody else on that mound on that day had been crucified and maybe flogged and maybe beaten. And there are occasions where hundreds were crucified at once and left to hang there and rot on the cross.

You know, as a visual example of the justice of Rome. But it was something more that



happened to Jesus that made the difference for the satisfaction of sin. All right.

Thank you, Timothy. Thank you, Nourkish. We appreciate you sending in your questions.

If you have a question, send it on Twitter with the hashtag #strask or you can go through our website. Just go to our podcast page. Go to #strask and you'll see a link there to leave a question.

We look forward to hearing from you. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cockel for Stand to Reason.

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