

Trusting God or Trusting Ourselves: Abortion, Euthanasia & Sphere Sovereignty¹

Hilton P. Terrell, M.D., Ph.D.

A customer comes to your counter and presents a couple of prescriptions to be filled for her. The girl is about 19 or so and looks irritable and restless. Though not for RU 486, you recognize the prescriptions as almost certainly written as abortifacients. They could be used for other purposes, but you don't get many prescriptions for Cytotec, for example, in a teenager. What should you do? To whom are you accountable?

A middle-aged man hands you several scripts, all written by the same physician. The doctor is known as the local Kevorkian. The scripts look like they could be used for lethal purposes, though they could have a legitimate purpose. You know the customer well. The prescriptions are for his mother, who has been fighting cancer for several years. Your profile on her shows a number of pain medications, two antidepressants, two soporifics and a synthetic hormone. What should you do? To whom are you accountable?

You work in a hospital pharmacy, mostly on the inpatient side. An order comes down for a succinylcholine-type of drug, a barbiturate, and potassium, all IV forms. You know that the patient is not on a ventilator and is not scheduled for surgery. The diagnosis is Lou Gehrig's disease. The patient is 42 years old. What should you do? To whom are you accountable?

To whom are you accountable? Patient. God. Your conscience, yourself. Your employer. Your church. The government.

Are any of these entities really wrong? Do you think that they will all agree? Are we caught in situations which are inescapable unless we do something wrong?

Ethics is an "Ought" Issue

With respect to the first question – what **should** you do? – did you answer instead "what **would** you do?" Did you use the word "would"? The first thing about getting ethics right is to get the question right, which means as clearly as possible. If you are a person for whom what you would do and what you should do never differ, then my point is irrelevant. So often, however, I find that people will confuse their frailty, their liability to sin, with an understanding of how to get

¹ This was originally given as a talk to the Christian Pharmacy Association in March 1998, in Rocky Mount, North Carolina.

a knowledge of the right answer. Let's admit, then, on the front end, that we all fail at times to do what we ought to do. That is an issue of obedience. Before we obey, though, we need to know what the requirement is. We can come back to obedience, but for now need to work on what we ought to do.

Ethics Defined. Biblical Ethics Defined

Ethics are those moral principles governing our conduct. I am going to assume that we are all Christians. For us, then, ethics are those principles governing our conduct which come from our regenerated, redeemed status as we respond to the Word of God and Christ, our Master. Now that we are born again, how ought we to serve Him in our behavior, as stewards of what time, health, knowledge, privileges, and opportunities He has put into our control? I will assume that as Christians, we are all clear on the matter that we do not earn our salvation from God by our behavior; that we are rather in thralldom to Him because of what He did for us. We therefore want to please Him by doing all things whatsoever He has commanded us. We love Him, and wish to keep His commandments. If you are not Christian, or not sure, just be patient with us and listen carefully. Perhaps some of it will make some sense to you, and someone near you can later try to explain our peculiar orientation to the universe.

Back to these instances, which I do not think are far-fetched at all. If you have not already faced them, it seems reasonable to me that you soon will.

Biblical Ethics Answered Generically

What should you do? You should obey God.

To do that, you should hear Him.

To do that, you should read His Word, pray, and make use of the other means that He has given to us to live as He wants.

Ethical Relativity is not Biblical

Well, now, nowhere does the Bible speak to succinylcholine, nor barbiturates, nor Cytotec. So it's all just a matter of personal choice. What's right for you may not be right for me, as people are wont to say today. Not exactly. The only case in which I can not sin in the same action that is sin for you is if you are committing an act which is not a sin in God's law, but which in your as-yet-poorly-instructed conscience is a sin. (See 1 Cor. 8:10-13; Romans 14:1-13). You may think it sin, for example, to eat venison. It is not wrong to do so according to God's law. However, it is more important for you not to violate your conscience. So, you should not eat venison (until you have become better instructed) nor should I tempt you to eat venison against your conscience.

In summary, ethics are not “personal,” and they are not relative.

All Ethics are Religious

With this one exception which is an allowance for our ignorance, we all are accountable to the same standard.

Not just Christians, by the way. All mankind stands under God’s Word, whether it is known to all or not. Some try to take refuge by saying that it’s okay for some to believe the Bible and live by it, but others may choose to live by other standards. The Bible doesn’t agree with this, and those of us who want to live by Biblical standards cannot agree with those who exempt themselves this way. As we have opportunity, we are to teach them otherwise. When Adam and Eve sinned, their sin brought death and damnation upon the whole human race, not just upon some. The gospel is our deliverance from that damnation. The unsaved remain in that damnation. Further, the moral law in Scripture is not just for Christians.² It does have different functions for Christians and non-Christians. For Christians are under grace, and we see in the law what Christ has done for us and also how He expects us to behave in serving Him.³ For non-Christians the law shows them the deadness in which they exist and their need of deliverance.⁴

So, let us be freed from those snares which would have it that every person is free to make up his or her own code of morality and that it may or may not include the Bible. As Christians, we cannot agree with them in that.

Our hospital has a non-discriminatory policy which holds that no one will be discriminated against on the basis of race, ethnicity, age, or religion. I don’t recall all the categories, but you are familiar with this drill. Think about it, though. Religion? A person can be a practitioner of any religion, and we cannot discriminate against him? That is ridiculous! A few native Americans include hallucinogens in their worship. Child sacrifice has frequently been a part of many religions. Temple prostitution is another frequent part, and may soon be making a comeback. Some believe in mercy-killing. Some polls (which are always suspect to me) indicate that a bare majority of Americans already believe in euthanasia. Birth control by any method, including abortifacient methods, is practiced by huge numbers. For the very few thoughtful ones in this group, the issue of abortion is often handled by religious concepts as to when the soul enters the developing human being, or when personhood begins.

We are awash in religious beliefs and the practices which stem from them. They are not at all compatible. Yet, we pretend that we can all live together in a happy pluralism. We cannot. It is absurd.

² Romans 2:15, Gal. 3:21-22, 1 Tim. 1:8; See Westminster Larger Catechism Q&A 93-97

³ Romans 7:4,6

⁴ Rom. 7:9, Gal. 3:24, Rom. 1:20, Gal. 3:10

In summary, ethics are all religious, and, again, not merely “personal.”

So, you receive prescriptions which look to you as if they are going to require you to violate your own beliefs in order to fill them, that they are going to immerse your hands in blood, for example. Religious conflict. What should you do?

Passing the Buck not Necessarily a Good Answer

Let's set aside a cute, quick answer. If you decide to pass the prescriptions on to someone in the pharmacy who does not have the same scruples that you do, what have you done? If you believe that abortion and euthanasia are truly murder, passing along a “contract” for murder to someone else does not relieve your complicity. “I don't take out contracts for murder. However, that person down the street, he does. See him. His office hours are 8 to 5, Mondays through Fridays, and the entrance is on the side of the building.”

Of course, not. Pontius Pilate did not really wash his guilt from his hands when he turned Christ over for execution, nor can we.

That approach pretends that the your scruples are peculiar to and binding only upon yourself. It would make the individual conscience supreme and solitary. As I mentioned, Scripture tells us otherwise. Consciences are important, but they are not independent of other authority.

In summary, we cannot ethically “dump” unethical behavior on someone else.

Spheres of Authority Identified

What are these authorities, and how are they related?

- Conscience
- School
- Family
- Workplace
- Church
- Civil Ruler

Here, then, are some relational concepts central to managing conflicts on ethics. I do not say “resolving” conflicts, but rather “managing.” That is because I do not believe that every conflict can be resolved. There are going to be some casualties. We don't want the casualties to be the Truth, another human being, another's soul, or our own. Yet, we cannot make zero casualties our highest goal. We should seek to minimize casualties, but not let that desire rule every other consideration.

In summary, our end point cannot always be resolution in this life. Understanding how God has distributed authority among human beings will help us understand how we ought to behave.

Don't Imagine that Pharmacy is "Different"

The Bible tells us that our test here in pharmacy is not peculiar and that it has an answer that will enable us to obey God without sinning. "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13). The word "test" serves as well as "temptation." God provides ethical tests for us, and in them shows us Himself, the sufficiency of His Word, and shows us ourselves and our need of Him.

We are often lazy, and expect Him to show us some escape hatch experientially, as we read in accounts of people like Corrie ten Boom or others who have been sorely tested and delivered. Surely, He can do that. It is, though, His Word that is our manual of instruction.

In summary, we cannot plead that our case is special or that God has left us without sufficient guidance.

Spheres of Authority and Responsibility

GOD⁵

All authority originates in Him and is accountable to Him. God has dispensed portions of his authority, along with the conjoined responsibility, to several categories of recipients. Do not imagine these spheres as arranged hierarchically, from greater to lesser. They are complementary. All, however, are ultimately accountable to God.

CONSCIENCE⁶

There is legitimate authority given by God to each of His reasonable creatures. Our conscience is our court of last resort before we come into His court. It is to this court of our conscience that the so-called "conscience clauses" in employment refer. Peter and John overruled even religious authority when the Sanhedrin told them to stop speaking in the name of Jesus. Acts 4:19-20 gives their response: "But Peter and John answered and said to them, 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we

⁵ A few passages illustrating God's Sovereignty: Gen. 1:1a; Ex.3:14; Job 38-42:4; Ps. 33, 47, 97, 104

⁶ A few passages illustrating the place of conscience: Acts 4:19-20; 2 Cor. 1:12; 1 Cor. 11:27-32; 1 Tim.1:5; 1 Peter 2:18,19; Titus 1:15; 1 Tim. 4:2

cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” Notice that Peter and John managed conflict but did not work out a mutually satisfactory arrangement. The Sanhedrin was left frustrated. Later,⁷ they were beaten by this still-frustrated group.

A clean conscience is given a prominent place in God’s Word. In 2 Corinthians 1:12, Paul writes of the “testimony of our conscience.”

Our conscience is the primary testing place when we approach the Lord’s table for communion.⁸

1 Timothy 1:5 places a “good conscience” into the arena with the commandments of God, love, and sincere faith.

1 Peter 2:18-19 tells us that it “is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully.”

You can see here that a conscience can overrule other powers rightfully and that we are not to let foresight as to possible consequences deter us. The preceding verse addresses this matter to “servants” with respect to their “masters.” It would appear that this matter speaks specifically to the state of employment.

It is a dreadful thing to violate your conscience, especially repeatedly. For a conscience can become insensitive like scar tissue – which neither sweats nor blanches nor flushes nor serves any other purpose but to keep the outside world at bay.

Titus 1:15 tells us that a conscience can be defiled, and 1 Timothy 4:2 tells us of hypocritical liars who have a conscience seared as with a hot iron.

So, one authority is our conscience. It is important. It can be in conflict with other authorities. It can overrule them, which is not to say that in every conflict it must do so. Jeremiah 17:9 reminds us that our inner being is untrustworthy, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Who can know it? I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind...” Proverbs 16:2 tell us, “All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, But the Lord weighs the spirits.”

The conscience is fallible. It is malleable. These problems are true of all human authority. It is one reason why there are multiple spheres of authority. The multiplicity of them helps each of them to serve as a check on the others, when one or more of the others gets out of line. Understanding of this gave rise to the design of our federal government with its three branches and “checks and balances,” without which we would be in worse shape than we are now. The

⁷ Acts 5:40

⁸ 1 Cor. 11:27-32

founding fathers of our federal system understood very well the concepts of sphere sovereignty.

In summary, regarding our conscience:

1. We should not violate it.
2. We should know that it is fallible.
3. We should check it out with other authorities God has established.
4. We should seek to develop it and correct it.
5. It can become seared through the practice of violating it.

FAMILY⁹

Let's look at another sphere of authority. The family. Specifically, the father. Just be offended if you must, but it seems clear enough to me that the husband is head of the wife¹⁰ and the focal point of family authority is lodged with the husband.

How would this relate to pharmacy? Very simply, do you hand out prescriptions to minors, even if the drug is for that minor? If so, aren't you a bit concerned about that practice, at least for some drugs? I am focusing on abortion and euthanasia, but a closely related and far more commonplace issue is the provision of birth control pills for reason of birth control to the unmarried, many of whom are minors.

Americans are reflexively individualistic. Don't tread on me no longer means don't mess with the state of Vermont corporately as it did originally. It means don't tread on me, individually. I am my own boss. No one tells me what to do. The hero of many movies, especially action and adventure movies is the rugged individualist. Did John Wayne ever stop to consult with his family, with his church, with the governor? I don't recall it ever happening. It was John Wayne against the bad guys, and the only touchstone was his conscience.

Children already have the "right" to have an abortion without their parents' consent or even knowledge. Should your conscience permit you to assist them in exercising this "right"? Does God? Generally, when you assist someone in doing something that is wrong, your hand is tainted also. Three men kidnap someone and kill him. The criminal law holds that "the hand of one is the hand of all." All are partakers in this capital crime unless one can show that he was absent, resisted it, etc.

With the filling of prescriptions, it is not always certain what the use is to be. Sometimes you will be snookered. Most of us are afraid of being too inquisitive. But, these issues do not deliver us from the straightforward ones when you have excellent reason to know that your customer is up to no good. While it is not our duty to enter their sphere of personal responsibility

⁹ The limits of family authority and responsibility are set by such passages as: Deut. 6:5-9, 20-25; 21:19-21; Prov. 13:24; 22:15; 23:13-14; Eph. 6:1-4; 1 Tim. 5:4, 8

¹⁰ Eph. 5:22, 23; Col. 3:18; 1 Tim. 2:11-15

and coercively prevent him, it is our duty to keep ourselves from joining him as well as our opportunity to warn him from his course of action. That our culture will take great offense at such meddling is understood.

Despite years of sermons to the contrary, we are not our brother's keeper, in the sense of being a zookeeper. We are to seek our brother's best interests, and in that sense we are his keeper, but, when he disagrees with us about what is best, we are not generally to try as individuals to coerce him into our way of behaving. We are our brother's brother (or sister).

Perhaps a policy of checking with parents before handing legend drugs to older minors would be a good one, at least for certain drugs which have a potential for misuse or which flag trouble a family should be aware of and dealing with. A combination of metronidazole, doxycycline, and an antibiotic effective against *Neisseria gonorrhea* would be one example. Sure, I can dream up other reasons than STD's why such things would be coming in a group like that. I can also imagine how leprechauns look.

In summary, pharmacy practice ought to try to support family authority. It is, however, not the pharmacist's duty to replace or usurp family authority.

CHURCH¹¹

Next, let's look at church authority. Get out your magnifying lenses, since church authority has shrunk so as to be invisible to the naked eye. The church's authority is moral. The church does not spank or issue fines or imprison. It disciplines, theoretically, by persuasion, by example, by compassionate action, by preaching and teaching, and by exclusion from fellowship and office. As much as conservative Christians have clucked about erosion of morality, it is odd that we have not ourselves heeded or developed the moral authority of the Church. Have you ever heard of a dispute being adjudicated by the church?¹²

Well, how on earth can the church be practically linked to pharmacy practice?

1. Exercise the church by asking the leaders and teachers in your church to help you with ethical issues. Expect them, through lack of practice, to try to squirm out of it, or to give you wifty, useless answers, or to say that they don't know anything about pharmacy, or to tell you to pray (as the only answer). God has placed in the church those with the moral authority, the spiritual gifts, and the talents to help us. Use them.

2. Check out your church with respect to what your denomination is doing with respect to

¹¹ Church authority is presented most fully in the Old Testament Israel, but specific passages include: Matt. 16:18-19, which is echoed in Rev. 3:7 and hence is connected to King David in the Old Testament; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; 5:17; 1 Cor. 5:13

¹² 1 Cor. 6:1-8

provision of drugs in various ministries. Not infrequently, some denominations have supported some questionable or wrong practices. You may be less at risk if you are a member of a non-denominational church, but you can watch for it also in cooperative mission endeavors with other churches.

3. It's risky to contemplate, but what if one of your church members engages in behavior that looks like one of these sins – abortion or euthanasia – to you? Do you believe that there is a rigid wall of separation between your workplace, with “churchy” things on one side and your “professional” things on the other? Where is that in Scripture? This could come up with respect to a member whose prescriptions evidence such sin, or with respect to fellow pharmacist members. An excellent question to put to your leaders, before it comes up, is what the church expects of you in such a circumstance. If the answer dodges any possible pathway to discipline, then understand that your church doesn't know fully how to love you, since it won't (morally) spank you.

In summary, pharmacists ought to use the resources in their church proactively to sort out some of the ethical problems before they arise, expecting the church to be unaware of and hesitant to deal with such specific issues. The pharmacist ought not to support a rigid division between “professional” life and “church” life. Help the church love its members by supporting biblical church discipline.

THE CIVIL GOVERNMENT¹³

Word Usage Indicates Modern Bias

When the word “government” is used today, it virtually always is used to refer to a civil government. To rectify that tendency is a part of my point. Each age has its characteristic flaws in which one or another of the spheres of governance is too strong and one or more is too weak. There was a time in Christendom when the Church was too strong, and we remember the Inquisition and wars taken up by the Church and undue penetration of the family by the Church. At other times family dynasties have been too strong for the civil state or the Church. The last verse in the book of Judges records a time when the individual conscience had undue reign, “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”¹⁴

In our time, the civil state is in ascendance. It penetrates virtually every part of our lives, down to minutiae. It certainly has penetrated pharmacy. The very existence of the FDA, with its ponderous rules about what can be sold, how it can be labeled, and how it can be advertised is witness to the civil government's power. Your licensure is from a state government. Both abortion and euthanasia are issues because the civil government has protected the former and

¹³ Some passages illustrating the legitimacy and limits of civil government include: Deut. 17:14-20; 1 Sam. 10:25; 1 Sam. chapters 8 and 9; Rom. 13:17

¹⁴ Judges 21:25

appears poised to protect the latter. Close to home is the government's usurpation of power in the employer-employee relationships. Employers are no longer possessed of many tools by which they may choose how to operate their businesses. They cannot really interview applicants for their jobs. They can determine wages and hours only within limits set by the government. Safety rules are complex, unclear, and very burdensome. They cannot fire employees freely. And so on. We'll get to these latter issues under the sphere of authority of the workplace.

Power is not the Same as Legitimate Authority

Mao Tse Tung said that political power proceeds from the muzzle of a gun. That seems true enough. It does not follow from that, however, that rightful authority to exercise power through a civil government proceeds from the muzzle of a gun. Rightful political power proceeds from God, to people individually, who then collectively transmit a portion of this authority given to them by God to a civil government.

Responsibility of the People

The people are not rightfully free to transmit all authority to a civil ruler. And, authority so transmitted is revocable. The people retain the right to revoke the civil ruler's power when and if it is misused. People who thought most clearly about these matters were those who declared a war of secession from Great Britain in 1776 and who then set up a new government here not long after the conclusion of that war.

There are Limits, Need for a Constitution

One of the things which our nation's founders knew better than do we today is that a civil ruler must be carefully hedged about lest he become too powerful. That our nation lasted as long as it did before the ruler became so powerful is testimony to their wisdom. The ruler was hedged in several ways. One is that our nation was, at one time, limited by a constitution. They did not think themselves free to set up any constitution they wanted. Some among them knew that God Himself had outlined the proper constitution for civil rulers.

God has Outlined the Limits of Civil Government

Deuteronomy 17:14-20 gives this constitution:

"When you come to the land which the LORD your God is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, 'I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around me,' you shall surely set a king over you whom the LORD your God chooses; one from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not set a foreigner over you, who is not your brother. But he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, for the LORD has said to you, 'You shall not return that way again.'

Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself.

“Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites. And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel.”

At the time of the proclaiming of Israel’s first king, Samuel reminded the people of this constitution; 1 Samuel 10:25, “Then Samuel explained to the people the behavior of royalty, and wrote it in a book and laid it up before the Lord. And Samuel sent all the people away, every man to his house.”

In 1 Samuel 8 and 9, we have an account of God’s warning to Israel through Samuel about how kings would behave. This is a warning, not a justification for all these ways that kings would behave.

We have a summary restatement in the New Testament of the reason for the existence of a civil ruler.¹⁵ Taken out of the context of the whole Bible, the Romans 13 passage has been misused by many to justify turning over to Caesar everything that Caesar asks for. Not so. Verse 7 tells us to render to Caesar his due. He is not due everything he demands. Actually, when Caesar no longer is a terror to those who are evil but actually becomes a terror to those who do good, it becomes the duty of the people to revoke the authority which they have given to the ruler. Not individually. Corporately. No lone rangers allowed. No terrorism or independent acts to overthrow a government. As much as we may chafe at the evil set over us now, we must know that having a civil ruler is indeed of God, and we must not long for chaos. Civil rule, by its nature, is corporate. We disobey God if we seek to be out from under civil rule. Our duty is rather to seek to be under godly civil rule.

Our so-called revolutionary war was not a revolutionary war at all. The colonies were not seeking to be out from under governance, nor were they seeking to take over London and Parliament and unseat King George III. They wanted to be under godly rule, determined that King George III was not a godly ruler, opted for their colonial parliaments, and seceded from England. Thus, our war was vastly different from the one that followed it about 15 years later in France, which was a true revolution, viciously anti-god, and has crippled France to this day.

Enough of history. You want this to be simple, formulaic, or at least no more complicated

¹⁵ Romans 13:1-7

than that Michaelis-Menton equation. No. If you really want to understand, you will need to dig, especially in a problem as thorny as how to behave as a Christian employee pharmacist in a system that does not recognize God.

To summarize: the point of all this foregoing on the civil ruler is to say that one of our greatest problems today is that the civil ruler has outgrown his britches and is hindering the proper exercise of authority in the other spheres. We do have a few things going for us in such things as “conscience clauses,” but employers have ways of getting around those, as we know.

SCHOOL

Some people believe that there is a legitimate sphere of authority in the school. I list it for completeness. I am not sure. If it exists it is not greatly relevant to what I wish to move to.

WORKPLACE¹⁶

Servants and Slaves

There is somewhat more evidence for a fifth sphere of authority in the workplace. The New Testament contains a number of references to how “servants” are to behave and be treated.¹⁷ If these references apply only to slaves, then I am not sure how they would apply to us. We are, in fact, slaves in a large number of senses. The bumper sticker reads, “I owe, I owe, so off to work I go.” As a nation we are debt slaves. One very practical way you can help yourself to behave ethically in pharmacy practice is to shuck your debt as quickly as you can and avoid it in the future. Will Rogers said, “You can’t break a man that don’t owe.” Many a person has been coerced into violating their conscience because they so needed their income stream to pay their debts. Indebtedness is not sin, but may be comparable to anger. Anger is not sin, either, but it is certainly an occasion for sin. Debt is like that.

The sum of the New Testament passages is that we are to work diligently for our employers, to be honest, not to be sassy, to be able to relate our work to Scripture, to honor their office as employer, and to be motivated because we are serving God in serving our employer, and not to present a mere veneer of obedience.

Limits on Employer Sovereignty

If we remember that we are serving God by serving our employer, it becomes clearer that there are limits on what we can do in service to our employer. We are not called to do things that represent disobedience to God just because our employer tells us to. The authority that an

¹⁶ Some scriptures referring to workplace governance: Titus 2:9,10; 2 Tim. 2:15 (addressed to Timothy in his role as a preacher, but applicable to all workers); 1 Tim. 6:1,2; Col. 3:22; Eph. 6:5-9; Exodus 20:8-11

¹⁷ Ex. 21:1-11; Lev. 25:39-55

employer has comes from God. Therefore, the authority ends where God's delegation to them ends. There are no absolute human authorities.

The Effect of Attitude on Negotiations

Being sinners, our employers can be expected from time to time to ask of us things that are opposed to God. We can recall that our attitude may go part of the distance in managing the conflict. The attitude is humility. "I am not trying to correct you, I am trying to remain consistent with my beliefs. Please help me to work out a way that I can serve you without violating my conscience." Sometimes a savvy employer will ask for evidence that your religious beliefs are not just your personal desire to escape some duty, masked as religion. There is plenty of that around, so employers are not unrealistic in inquiring. At this point, it will have helped to have been through the matter with someone in your church ahead of time.

Also, it is helpful to decide ahead of time what is and what is not negotiable. If you begin to negotiate non-negotiables, you are lost. If you make negotiables non-negotiable, you are likewise lost.

Employers Really are Government Overseers

In a substantial way, most of us work for the government. I am not speaking of the burdensome taxes we pay, though that, too. That means that our employers also work for the government. They are not so much our employers as they are overseers or intermediaries for the government. I know that is a rather strong statement. Let me see if I can adduce some supportive evidence to it:

1. Employers are not free to negotiate the full range of wages.
2. Employers are required to collect taxes owed by the employee and give them to the government, for no pay, only for threat.
3. Employers are required to maintain extremely burdensome record keeping for government inspection.
4. Employers are required to set aside funds for the employee in the even the employee is laid off.
5. Employers are forbidden to inquire closely into the employee's situation – marriage, religion, disabilities, age, dependent children, even in some states former criminal record.
6. Employers can be held accountable for actions of the employee, even if those actions are contrary to explicit directions to the contrary.

7. Employers are required to make “reasonable accommodation” for disabilities with draconian penalties for violation.

8. Employers are subject to charges of discrimination that are difficult to defend if they fire someone.

9. Large employers are even forbidden to close down their enterprise without a government-approved period of notice to the employees.

10. Employers are required to pay for work-related injuries and illnesses, which is reasonable except when one becomes acquainted with the ridiculous theories by which such claims are often connected to the workplace.

11. Employers are not free to contract for any medical insurance policy, but only policies which meet government rules.

12. Employers have to keep files even on applicants for jobs for years.

13. Employers are required to act as the border patrol in that they must file a form that an employee is not an illegal alien with days of onset of employment. The penalties are huge for failure to file the form.

14. Employers are required to set aside certain parking spaces and mark them.

15. Employers are required to mark certain things in Braille. (The all-time stunner on this one were the Braille markings on the overhead operating room lights.)

16. Employers are required to post large notices of certain rights of workers.

17. Employers who have drinking cup dispensers are required to have a cover over the top of the cylinder from which the cups are dispensed.

18. Keep going until you have a bookshelf of requirements at least a foot long, with some incomprehensible, some contradictory, some arcane, and some outdated.

With all these restrictions and more, it is clear why employers have become very cagey and evasive with respect to employee policies.

Individuals Cannot Resolve in Present System

We will not solve many of our ethical difficulties until each sphere of authority is again allowed to function as God intended. In the meanwhile, there is a meanwhile. One of the ways we “manage” ethical conflicts now is by playing one of the spheres over against another. Since

the civil ruler is the agent that now holds the most power, each of the other agents tries to use the civil ruler to gain what he/she wants. Even when what you seek is only your legitimate due, I have doubts about the legitimacy of using the civil ruler to obtain that which the civil ruler should have no authority over. For example, suppose you were fired as a pharmacist, and yet you were not given the real reason, which was, say refusal to dispense abortifacient drugs. Should you seek recourse by lawsuit against your employer under a “conscience clause” statute?

In some ways that seems legitimate. Yet, in a wider view, it only perpetuates the underlying problem of having Caesar too powerful and too much involved in matters that ought to be otherwise managed more directly.

Seeking More Nearly Ultimate Solutions

Should Christians seek laws that regulate things which are not legitimately Caesar’s to regulate?

- What you put in your mouth with the intention of helping yourself get well or stay well?
- Whom you seek out to give you advice on getting well or staying well?
- What constitutes sufficient evidence that a substance is effective enough for you to want to try it?
- What constitutes sufficient evidence that a substance is safe enough for you to want to try it?
- What will be taught in school? Who will teach it?
- Whether there will be air bags in your car?
- That bags of sand for children’s sandboxes shall have labels on them reading, “Not intended to be eaten.”
- That a wife can bring a charge of rape against her own non-estranged husband.
- That balloons should not be manufactured.
- That peaches under 2” in diameter cannot be sold retail at any price.
- That a four year old’s tooth removed at the dentist’s office cannot be given to the child for the tooth fairy.
- That the toilet in your new bathroom shall not use more than 1.6 gallons per flush.

If you believe that these matters should be in the control of Caesar, then you have to face one of two issues: (1) you need to be able to demonstrate from Scripture that God has indeed given these tasks to Caesar, or (2) you need to accept that we are without specific guidance from God, and it is simply a matter of who has the most power that will determine these kinds of things.

On the one hand, if we do not turn to the power of Caesar today, we are foregoing the one thing that in the short run is more likely to accomplish a legitimate end. On the other hand, when we turn to illegitimate means to obtain illegitimate ends, we gain a short-term objective and forego a long-term need.

Short-term vs. Longer-term

I do not have a clear answer. I tend to want to see things resolved over the long-term. I recognize that even for short-term accomplishments, even Caesar is unable to deliver. One of the unintended longer-term outcomes of using Caesar even when he should be “out of the loop” is that it subtly reinforces his sovereignty where he should not be sovereign. Another is that it will likely mean that when Caesar falls from his position of great power that the fall will be great indeed, with many people hurt. Indeed, Caesar is now so powerful that the tower of Babel comes to mind, if not the flood of Noah. His decline, especially if it is precipitous, will be exceedingly painful for many.

Centrality of Control

Ethics of Pharmacy Practice are like the ethical issues in many other fields. They have to do with the issue of who is in control. We will never sort them out until we understand that the ultimate control is God's. That our duty is to discover His will and to do it and to let Him take care of the outcomes. He is trustworthy.

Americans are characterized by a “can do” attitude. We are performance oriented. While there are many advantages to this there are also characteristic faults. We are prone to seek control beyond our rightful sphere, to take over from someone else. Don't like the abortion center? Just bomb it! Don't care for Kevorkian? Just kill him. Don't like the employer? Just sue him. Don't like your neighbor's trashy yard? Get a zoning ordinance passed. Don't like the way your acquaintance is raising her child? Anonymously report her for child abuse. Don't think people should use echinacea for their ailments? Use the FDA to have it prohibited.

One characteristic all of these approaches use is their ends-justify-the-means assumption. God wants us to seek good ends. He also wants us to use good means. Respecting His division of authority is basic.

Specifics vs. Systematics

While the specifics of RU-486, Cytotec, birth control pills, and Kevorikian mixtures are important we must seek to change the world system through God-ordained means. Evangelism, teaching them all things whatsoever I have commanded you, church discipline, family discipline, appeal to the civil magistrate, political action, fulfilling our civic duties (how I wish I had time to review “jury nullification”), raising and governing our families, keeping our consciences clear. Humbly, firmly we are holding the position that we are seeking to obey God within a world system we often do not agree with.