

# Christianity and understanding of different social issues

[Sociology](#), [Human Rights](#)



According to Dr. James Sire, a worldview is “ a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundations on which we live and move and have our being (Sire 20).” No one operates outside of a worldview, no matter what that worldview may be. In fact, his worldview influences everything that a man says, does, and produces. Some worldviews lead men to live morally upright lives. Other worldviews land people in situations that seem clearly wrong to society. Some decisions that are affected by worldviews, however, are not as black and white. One of these issues is the death penalty. America has a long history with corporal punishment. At its foundation, the United States justice system would execute prisoners by means of hanging. By 1890, state legislators instituted electrocution as a more “ instantaneous,” “ painless” way of execution, though the latest hanging happened in 1996, just ten years ago. In the 1980s, lethal injection became the newest way to take the life of prisoners (Ford 80-81). Throughout the history of the death penalty in America, questions have been raised such as, “ should it be painless?” “ is it justifiable?” and “ what type of crime constitutes death?” One might argue, however, that with a worldview that says, “ life should be lived from the foundation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and him crucified,” the death penalty cannot be justified.

In his book *The Universe Next Door*, Dr. James Sire poses his first of eight worldview questions: “ What is Prime Reality (Sire 22)?” This question sets

the stage for the other seven questions that are to follow. To know what a man believes is really real is to know what he will orient his entire existence around. There is but one reality that man cannot live without. Prime reality is the One True God revealed in the Holy Scriptures. He is triune in nature—one God made up of three persons who are coequally and coeternally God. Hastings puts it perfectly when he says, “[t]he Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods, but one God. The Godhead of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost is all one, the Glory equal, the Majesty co-eternal” (Hastings 949). In the words of The Apostles’ Creed, the One True God is the “ Creator of Heaven and earth” (Felix n. p.). He was present before the world existed, and will continue to be present long after it ceases to exist. His is a relational God that desires to be in communion with His people. To all who believe in Him, He gives the right to be called children of God (John 1: 12). God is not only spirit, but he also put on flesh and became a man. When man’s sin separated him from God, “ God humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2: 8). Jesus came to redeem the world, and will ultimately stand as its judge according to Acts 10: 42. John 5: 22 says that “ not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son. As a result, man should not take it into his hands to judge someone as being worthy of death. This is the first argument against the death penalty. In fact, if it were justifiable for man to put someone else to death for his or her transgressions, there would be no one left since the Bible is clear that “ all have sinned” in Romans 3: 23, and according to Romans 6: 23, “ the

wages of sin is death.” Only God is all knowing. Only he has the wisdom and the right to judge the world. Only he sees the hearts of man.

There are multiple theories of creation. Some people would say that God used the process of evolution to create the world; others would say that God created the world over the course of thousands of years; still others would say that God created the world in exactly 7 24-hour days (“ Nine Views” n. p.). Regardless of the different theories, it can be agreed upon that a intelligent Creator created the world, and that Creator is Jesus. God created the world ex nihilo, or out of nothing. He spoke, and it was. God made the solar system, the seasons, plants, animals, and ultimately humans for his own glory. Acts 17: 26-27 says, “ And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us.” God created the world with a specific pattern and order so that man would recognize his creator. He created nature for the benefit of his people, as well. Austin Allibone quotes Jonathan Edwards as saying, “[s]urely there is something in the unruffled calm of nature that overawes our little anxieties and doubts: the sight of the deep-blue sky and the clustering stars above seem to impart a quiet to the mind” (Allibone n. p.). When God created nature it was good, but when man sinned, sin and death entered into the world and disrupted the perfection of nature. As a result, the earth is experiencing problems that God never intended it to have. There are floods, earthquakes, tornadoes, and climate changes that

threaten to take the lives of thousands of humans. Animals attack humans, and humans attack one another. This does not mean, however, that creation itself is evil. What God says is good is good, but man is paying the price for his own poor decisions. In his chapter "Christianity and the Survival of Creation," Wendell Berry writes,

We will discover that God made not only the parts of Creation that we humans understand and approve, but all of it: "all things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made" (John 1: 3). And so we must credit God with the making of biting and dangerous beasts, and disease-causing microorganisms. That we may disapprove of these things does not mean that God is in error, or that the creator ceded some of the work of Creation to Satan; it means that we are deficient in wholeness, harmony, and understanding—that is, we are "fallen (Berry 53).

**In his sermon titled "The Weight of Glory," C. S. Lewis writes**

There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal... It is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit...this does not mean that we are to be perpetually solemn. We must play. But our merriment must be that kind which exists between people who have, from the outset, taken each other seriously... And our charity must be a costly love, with deep feeling for the sins in spite of which we love the sinner... Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses (Lewis, "Weight of Glory," 698).

This means that human beings are not merely mortal beings purposelessly inhabiting the earth. Human beings are the image-bearers of God and

therefore they are holy. Human beings are also truth bearers, revealing different aspects of the nature of God in the things they say, do, and create. J. R. R. Tolkien once said, " We have come from God, and inevitably the myths woven by us, though they contain error, will also reflect a splintered fragment of the true light, the eternal truth that is with God. Indeed only by myth-making, only by becoming ' sub-creator' and inventing stories, can Man aspire to the state of perfection that he knew before the Fall" (Carpenter). Human beings are creators just like their Creator. Human beings are valuable. The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 5: 15 that Christ died for all, therefore every person that we encounter was worth the price of Jesus' suffering and death.

This understanding plays a significant role when it comes to evaluating the ethical dilemma that is the death penalty. Even criminals who have committed horrible crimes are immortals. As Lewis stated before, they are the most holy object with which we interact aside from the Lord. When we choose to take their life, we are forgetting that life is sacred and we are writing them off as an object worthy of destruction. This cannot be so easily done when we understand that they are the image-bearers of Christ.

There are only two options for a person at death. For a person who has committed their life to Christ, death is simply a beautiful relocation from this earth into heaven. In their Handbook of Christian Apologetics, Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli write, " the one thing you will for certain feel in heaven is that this is your home. This is what you were designed and made for" (Kreeft and Tacelli 278). Deitrich Bonhoeffer said,

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Death is only dreadful for those who live in dread and fear of it. Death is not wild and terrible, if only we can be still and hold fast to God's Word. Death is not bitter, if we have not become bitter ourselves. Death is grace, the greatest gift of grace that God gives to people who believe in him. Death is mild, death is sweet and gentle; it beckons to us with heavenly power, if only we realize that it is the gateway to our homeland, the tabernacle of joy, the everlasting kingdom of peace. How do we know that dying is so dreadful? Who knows whether, in our human fear and anguish we are only shivering and shuddering at the most glorious, heavenly, blessed event in the world? Death is hell and night and cold, if it is not transformed by our faith. But that is just what is so marvelous, that we can transform death (Metaxas 539).

There is a group of people, however, for whom death is something dreadful. There is a group of people who should be fearful of death. As Bonhoeffer stated, people who do not have faith find death to be hell and night and cold. Hell is a very real place of eternal separation from God for those who have not committed their lives to Jesus Christ. According to Kreeft and Tacelli, hell is deprivation of God, pain, and punishment (294-295).

The question of what happens to a person at death is significant when responding to the ethical dilemma of the death penalty. When a person's life is ended, that is it. There is no second chance for them. They are either eternally present in heaven with the Father, or they are eternally separated from him. To take a person's life is to send them to their final judgment. Were a prisoner to be sentenced to life in prison instead, perhaps they would

have an opportunity to hear the message of the Gospel and surrender their lives to Christ before it was too late for them.

There are two ways of knowing: natural revelation and supernatural revelation. Natural revelation is the knowing we experience through the world around us. Supernatural revelation is when God allows us to know something through his Word or through his voice. Jonathan Edward wrote, “[a]ll truth is given by revelation, either general or special, and it must be received by reason. Reason is the God-given means for discovering the truth that God discloses, whether in his world or his Word. While God wants to reach the heart with truth, he does not bypass the mind” (Edwards, n. p.). Both natural and supernatural revelation are made possible through reason.

Some would argue that there is no absolute standard for right and wrong and that right and wrong are simply relative to the person and the situation. The truth is, however, that Jesus is the source of ultimate truth and he establishes what is right and what is wrong. In his timeless work *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis writes,

The Moral Law, or Law of Human Nature, is not simply a fact about human behavior in the same way as the Law of Gravitation is, or may be, simply a fact about how heavy objects behave. On the other hand, it is not a mere fancy, for we cannot get rid of the idea, and most of the things we say and think about men would be reduced to nonsense if we did. And it is not simply a statement about how we should like men to behave for our own convenience; for the behavior we call bad or unfair is not exactly the same



as the behavior we find inconvenient, and may even be the opposite.

Consequently, this rule of Right and Wrong, or Law of Human Nature or whatever you call it, must somehow or other be a real thing- a thing that is really there, not made up by ourselves" (Lewis, Mere Christianity).

Lewis points out that man is a horrible source of his own morality. If people could determine for themselves what is right and wrong, it would be based off of their own comfort rather than off of what is the most beneficial for them and their relationship with God. People would determine right and wrong based on what better catered to their desires without regard for those around them. In Relationships of Grace, Chris Karcher writes, " integrity is choosing your thoughts and actions based on values rather than personal gain" (Karcher n. p.). Defining how we know what is right and wrong has a significant impact on the topic of corporal punishment because it shows that man must not determine right and wrong for himself, but rather based on the Word of God. If someone thinks it is right to put one person to death for their crime but to let another live, how can they know they are making the moral decision if they cannot clearly identify the answer in the Word of God?

History is linear which means that it is a sequence of events leading to the fulfillment of God's purposes for humanity (Voth). In her book Epic of Eden, Sandra Richter shows her reader how all of human history is really part of God's story of redemption (Richter). Not a single event has happened since the foundation of the earth that has not made an impact or that was not foreknown by God. God knew that man was going to choose death in the garden. He knew that the nation of Israel was going to betray him time and

time again. God knew that the world would reject his prophets and ultimately reject his Son. God knew that He would overcome death and the grave and that people would find eternal life through Him. God knew that millions of people would die in wars. He knew that millions more would come to know him through times like the Reformation, or Azusa, or Pentecost. Everything that happens in history is ultimately part of a beautiful story that we can only see in part. Sometimes events in history look dark and hopeless, but with Jesus, there is always hope. In their song "Voice of Truth," Casting Crowns sings, "But the voice of truth tells me a different story/ And the voice of truth says, "Do not be afraid!"/ And the voice of truth says, "This is for My glory"/ Out of all the voices calling out to me/ I will choose to listen and believe the voice of truth" (Casting Crowns).

There are a few commitments I have made that are consistent with my worldview. First of all, I commit to surrendering all authority in my life to the rule and reign of Jesus Christ. Secondly, I commit to love the people around me with the love of Christ to the best of my ability. Thirdly, I commit to taking care of the world around me by being a good steward of God's creation. Fourthly, I commit to looking for the bigger picture of God's plan in the events taking place around me. Fifthly, I commit to making the Word of God my guiding source of right and wrong. Sixthly, I commit to obeying that moral standard that the Word of God has set in place for me.

My worldview is constantly shifting as I become more intimate with Christ, battle with culture and what the world says is right, and resolve in my heart to follow Christ. However, I will always stand by my statement that life

should be lived from the foundation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and him crucified. This is an unchanging truth. It is an unchanging truth that God is Prime Reality, that he created the world, that man was made in his image, that heaven and hell are truth, that it is God who gives us the ability to know, that there are moral absolutes, and that all of human history has meaning that points back to Jesus. I stand by my initial statement that I do not believe corporal punishment, or the death penalty, is justifiable when living with a Gospel-oriented worldview.