

Practical Theology
Adapted from *The Church & Society* Syllabus by Henry W. Hollomon (1981-82)
Student Notes

PART TWO: BASIC PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIAN SOCIAL ETHICS

1. Responsibility for Christian Social Ethics

A. Neglect of responsibility (approx. first half of 20th century).

Reasons:

1. Evangelicals have rightly rejected liberalism.

a. Liberalism was usually associated with the _____ and with destructive biblical criticism which led to repudiation of a high view of Biblical inspiration.

b. Consequently, evangelicals have tended to reject any kind of social involvement along with rejection of liberalism

2. Evangelicals correctly believe that sin is inherent in Adam's descendants rather than being inherent in environment.

a. However, this has sometimes led to an almost exclusive emphasis on an unjustified _____ of the environment or surrounding society.

b. Furthermore, some evangelicals often feel that any effort to improve society is fruitless since Christ will totally renovate society at His coming.

3. Evangelicals have properly taught separation from the evil of the world (John 17:14-17; Romans 12:2; James. 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17).

a. But sometimes an unjustifiable _____ from the world is practiced instead of a ministering contact with the people and problems of the world (Luke 15:1-2)

b. Also, sometimes legitimate vocations in law (Tit. 3:13) and in politics (Acts 13:7-12) are viewed as unsuitable for Christians.

4. Evangelicals have accurately noted from Scripture that the present age will end with a corrupt society and an evil government which will be judged by God. (Rev. 6-19).

Some have _____ responded to this correct view by becoming so pessimistic and passivistic toward genuine human needs that they have failed to "do good to all men" (Gal. 6: 10; Acts 10:38).

B. Biblical basis for responsibility (Gal. 6:10, "*let us do good to all men*"). Cf. Acts 10:38.

1. The _____.

a. "*While we have opportunity*" (Gal. 6:10) — ὥς καιρον, "opportunity," also basic word for "time." Encompasses the remainder of an individual's life. cf. Jn. 9:4, ἕως / heōs (while) Jn. 12:35,

b. "*As opportunity presents*" (J. B. Lightfoot, *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians*, p. 220). Concerning the difference in the two possible translations (see points a. and b.), Lightfoot, p. 220, observes, "*The distinction is introduced by translation; the original hos (ὥς), covers both meanings.*"

c. Summary application.

(1) We should look for particular opportunities to do good and realize that we have only opportunity in this life to fulfill Gal. 6:10

(2) Since the length of this opportunity is unknown our time must be wisely invested (Ps. 90:12; Eph. 5:16; Col. 4:5).

(3) Our generation is our primary opportunity of impact for the Lord (Acts 13:36).

2. The _____.

a. "*Let us do good*" (1 pers. pl., pres. subj., deponent, from ἐργάζομαι / ergazomai)

(1) Emphasizes the "doing" as work, labor, or activity in contrast to idleness or inactivity

(2) This is a hortatory subjunctive, and therefore the exhortation of Galatians 6:10 is to be viewed as an obligation and not merely as an option for Christians

(3) The present tense (progressive idea) emphasizes that doing good is to be a regular habit or part of a Christian lifestyle

Practical observation: The Christian life is to be invested for the good of other people (Gal. 6:10 cf. Rom. 12:17, 19-21; 1 Pet. 3:8-9, 13-16) and ultimately for the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31).

b. "Good" or "what is intrinsically valuable, morally good" ¹ (τὸ ἀγαθόν / to agathon, substantival form).

(1) Emphasizes things that benefit, serve, and do good for other people

(2) Matt. 19:17; Mark. 10:18; Luke 18:19 – used of God Himself

(3) Rom. 8:28 – used of God's purpose in behalf of Christians

(4) Contrast to . . . καλὸν / kalon (Gal. 6:9), "beautiful in outward appearance" or "morally good, noble, praise-worthy."² E.g., καλὸν ἔργα, kala erga, "good works" which are outwardly manifested so that people may see them and glorify the Father (cf. Matt. 5:16).

3. The _____ ("*do good to all men*," Gal. 6:10).

a. This is one of the simplest and strongest points of Biblical evidence for Christian social ethics.

Cf. Matt. 22:39, "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*"

Luke 10: 25-37 – whoever is in legitimate need is my neighbor

b. "*All men*" seems clearly to be unrestrictive in view of the phrase that follows ("*and especially to those who are of the household of faith.*")

c. Every person then is a possible object of the Christian's beneficent ministry

The big problem is: how to apply and implement this principle

d. While this verse does teach the obligation of Christians to do good "*to all men*" (universal in scope), it does not teach universalism. i.e., that all men ultimately will be saved as Paul's distinction between the two groups in the verse makes clear.

e. This obligation does not deny the impartiality of God C. Rom. 2:11; James. 2:1.

f. This passage (Gal. 6:10) does teach the _____ responsibility of the Christian to his brothers and sisters in Christ (cf. Gal 3:26).

(1) This relationship is based on the Christian's membership in the spiritual family of God.

(2) The principle of Gal. 6:10 is analogous to a human father who has a special God-given responsibility to provide for his own family (1 Tim. 5:8).

¹Arndt and Gingrich, p. 3.

²Arndt and Gingrich, p. 401.

Such a father may have concern for other families in greater need than his own, and yet he may not be able to care for them as his own family

g. Although people outside of the household of faith are not spiritual children of God (John 1:12-13; 1 John 3:10):

(1) Acts 17:24-26, 29 – They are created by God

(2) Gen. 1:26-27; 9:6; James 3:9 – they bear God's image

The image of God in post-fall man is defaced by sin, but not erased.

(3) Acts 17:26; Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:45-49. All humanity has common origin in Adam

(4) Also, there is the commonality of human nature (Acts 17:15, "men of the same nature as you"). James. 5:17, "Elijah was a man with a nature like ours."

(5) John 3:16; Romans 5:8 - Commonality of sinners being loved by God

4. The _____ ("*especially to those who are of the household of the faith*").

"The faith is the body of Christian truth presented in Scripture. Therefore, "*the household of the faith*" would include those who have personally experienced this truth and adhere to it.

a. James 2:14-16 (cf. I Tim. 6:6-8).

V. 15 – the needy, "a brother or sister - Christians"

and the need, "without clothing & in need of daily food (basic life needs)

b. Matthew 6:25-34 – emphasizes food. Vs. 26 - . . . i.e. the birds.

Clothing . . . i.e. the lilies of the field

c. 1 John 3:16-17 – "brethren - brother"

Βίον τοῦ κόσμου / Bion tou kosmou – "the worlds gods" (NASB), "worldly goods" or "means of subsistence" (Arndt and Gingrich, p. 141).

Idea of needs of this earthly life - Eph. 5:28-29 - nourish, cherish

d. Romans 12:13 – "contributing to the needs of the saints." Note emphasis on needs - compare Romans 16:26

5. The _____.

a. "*Let us not lose heart* (ἐγκακῶμεν / egkakōmen, probably includes attitude) *in doing good* (καλόν / kalon)" (Gal. 6:9). Cf. 2Thess. 3:13 (καλοποιῦντες / kalopoiontes). Proverbs 13:12 – Hope in the Lord is not deferred forever. Payday, someday

Hindrances to continuity in doing good to all men:

(1) I am not appreciated - E.g., Acts 10:38-39 – Example of Christ. He did perfect good, yet he was crucified

(2) I don't see any outward results yet

Gal. 6:7-8 cf. John 4:35-38 – We may have primarily a ministry of planting and watering while others do the reaping

b. "In due time we _____" – "payday, someday"

(1) Gal. 6:7-8 cf. 1 Cor. 15:58 There is a sowing and a harvest
– Cf. Heb. 6:10 – God remembers & God rewards

(2) James 5:7 – Scripture views our doing good as a time of sowing. "I am always giving and never receiving" - an improper complaint

(3) Note that reception of reward is based on the good that a person has done - 2 Cor. 5:10

- c. "If we do not grow weary" (μὴ ἐγκακῆσητε / mē egkakēsēte).
- (1) Has the idea of becoming slack, giving out, physical exhaustion (Matt. 15:32) or relaxing effort. Phil. 3:13-14
 - (2) Behind every good farm crop is a farmer who did not give up
 - (3) Cure for "give-up-itis" – Consider Christ (Heb, 12:3-5) and the future harvest (1 Cor. 15:58).

C. Biblical model for responsibility.

1. _____ model for responsibility (Acts 10:38, "*He went about doing good*").
 - a. Ps. 40:8; John. 2:4-5; 17:4; 19:30; Heb. 10:8-10 – Restrictive operation - within Father's will
 - (1) No one can do all the good that needs to be done
 - (2) But every Christian can do the will of the Father
This is the way to do the most good for the most people
 - b. Mark 2:1-12; John 5:1-7; 6:1-15 – Selective provision for physical needs . Not everyone who had physical needs had them met by the Lord.

NOTE WELL: Christ did not always meet pressing physical needs before He ministered to their spiritual needs
 - c. Mark 2:1-12 – Priority of spiritual before physical
Matt. 6:33 – Christ taught the general principle of meeting spiritual requirements before promising physical results
2. _____ model for responsibility.
 - a. Peter
 - (1) Acts 3:1-10 – Physical healing
Acts 3:11-26 – It appears that this miracle had the primary purpose to authenticate the message of salvation
 - (2) Acts 9:36-43 – Case of physical resurrection
V. 42 – This miracle also resulted in authenticating the Gospel
Vv. 36, 39 – Note the great example of Tabitha (Dorcas) in practice of Christian social action
 - b. John (Acts 3:1-26, see above).
Note John's teaching in 1 John 3:17-18 and in 3 John 11
 - c. Paul.
 - (1) 1 Cor. 9:16 – priority of the gospel "*woe is me if I preach not the gospel*"
 - (2) 1 Tim. 2:1-2 – Prayer for all men
 - (a) V. 1 – "*On behalf of all men*" probably includes prayer for their salvation
 - (b) V. 2 – purpose on behalf of believers – "that we may lead a quiet life in all godliness"
 - (3) Gal. 2:10 – Contribution for the poor
 - (a) Romans 15:26, "contribution for the poor saints primarily"
 - (b) Acts 11:27-30 – relief funds for saints at Jerusalem experiencing famine
 - d. Writer to the Hebrews.
Hebrew 13:3 – Sympathetic concern for prisoners and ill treated persons
 - e. James.
 - (1) James. 1:27 – concern for orphans & widows - visit them in their distress
 - (2) James 2:1-9 – concern for impartial treatment of people - especially the poor
 - (3) James 5:1-6--concern for oppression of poor workers

f. Jude 22-23 – Resolve of those involved in doubting, destruction or defilement

D. _____ for responsibility.

1. Isa. 8:20; John 17:17; 2 Tim. 2:15 – Any Christian social action must operate according to Scripture properly interpreted
2. Sin must be recognized as personal & internal rather than merely environmental
Therefore, sin is not curable by education, legislation or the false theory of evolution
E.g., High-rise housing initially created a clean environment, but sinful person soon turned it into an unclean vertical ghetto
A realistic view of sin is necessary for a realistic approach to social action
3. For a proper response to social needs Christians must maintain a Biblical relationship to the unsaved and to the world
In this regard, consider the _____:
 - a. Heb. 7:26 – He did not commit their sins. You do not have to sin to communicate effectively to sinners
 - b. Matt. 9:36 cf. John 8:11 – He had compassion upon them
Sometimes told, "Be careful that you don't become emotionally involved" (i.e. you can't carry everyone's problems)
 - c. Luke 15:1-2 – He maintained contact with them. Christ demonstrates that principles "a" & "c" are not inconsistent. You can have contact with sinners without sinning
 - d. John 3; 4 – He communicated the gospel to them
Such ministry often involved inconvenience. It seems that the more we serve others the more we suffer. Cf. Col. 1:24; 2 Cor. 11:23-28.
 - e. Acts 10:38 – He did good to them
4. Christian social action should generally be the outgrowth of personal _____
Granted, it is sometimes necessary to engage in social action (e.g. medical services, etc.) before personal evangelism
5. Christians must realize that social action will never bring complete salvation to man's environmental problems (John 12:8)
This principle should not result in passivism but in a realistic activism (cf. Gal. 2:10).
6. Christians must be careful to maintain a proper separation of church and state.
Whenever one dominates the other, serious problems can arise
E.g., Constantine – in his reign the state dominated the church
E.g., Roman Catholic Church – this church attempts to dominate the state

NOTE: This is due to the State often being controlled by sinners who then force evil upon the church and "tares among the wheat" in the church that rise to power and force evil upon the State. A proper understanding between Church & State is not two kingdoms in conflict, but two spheres through which God carries out His will. The "two kingdoms" in conflict are the realm of Satan & the Kingdom of Heaven. The church is to be a blessing to the State & society, and the State is to be a minister of good and suppressor of evil that protects church and society (Romans 13:3-4). Both spheres are blessed when godly people are in the positions of authority, and both are cursed with the ungodly hold those positions (Prov. 29:2) (SLH)

a The church can:

- (1) Romans 13:1-7 – present the divine ordination of the state
- (2) Define the state’s proper role
- (3) Suggest how the Christian can work in the state to attain justice

b. The state can:

- (1) Guarantee proper liberties
- (2) Preserve order (cf. Judges 21:25).
- (3) Promote justice.

Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Tim. 2:1-2; 1 Pet. 2:13-17 – All of these functions of state ideally are done within the bounds of Biblical responsibility.

7. Christian social action must be done in the name of Christ (Acts 3:6, 16) and for God's glory (1 Cor. 10:31).

Christians should not only condemn social evils, but also seek to constructively solve them

E. _____ for responsibility.

1. The Bible gives some specific principles applicable to Christian social action.

- a. Application of James 5:1-6 to cases of oppression where proper wages should be promptly paid to employees
- b. Application of 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 to the sin of sexual immorality so prevalent in society
- c. Application of James 2:1-12 to social, economic and racial prejudices
- d. Application of Ephesians 6:5-9; Col. 3:22-14:1 to employers- employee relations.

2. Christians should be careful about involvement of the church as an organization in social action.

Within the bounds of Scripture and conscience an individual Christian may feel free:

- a. to work for a particular political party or candidate
- b. or to set up extra church organizations in which all men could unite against entrenched evil

E.g., anti-slaver organizations were promptly dissolved when their work was completed

Cairns gives a helpful caution about the degree of the church's involvement in social action: “One wonders how far the church can go in acting as an institution, interacting with social problems without endangering a proper separation of church and state and without forgetting its main function of evangelism. This demands thought and Bible study both by pastor and people.”³

3. Christians must recognize that ministers are often woefully lacking in information, training, and equipment to handle complex social issues or to set up programs to deal with them.

Christian workers are frequently accused of having too simplistic solutions to very complex social problems.

a. More specifically, ministers are:

- (1) often less capable than politicians / government workers in matters of state (unless they have training in such matters)
- (2) distracted from their spiritual ministry by too much involvement in politics

b. Ministers can make the greatest impact for Christian social action by presenting moral and spiritual principles to guide citizens dealing with social problems

c. Ministers should visit & counsel with Christians involved in political & social work, pointing out Biblical principles, and encourage them to pray to God about problems, decisions & actions.

³Earle E. Cairns, *The Christian in Society* (Chicago: Moody, 1973), P. 111.

4. Christian social action should be approached with _____ information
 - a. See John 8:31-32, 36; 13:17; Ephesians 5:15 for principles of proper action preceded by accurate information.
 - b. E.g., the use of helpful summary sheets of the voting records on particular issues by political candidates
5. Christian social action must operate within the legitimate legal systems of civil government. E.g. allowance of lobbying and appealing unjust laws
 - a. voting as intelligent and informed Christian citizens
 - b. informing elected representatives of our opinions on issues. Use courteous, honest and signed correspondence or conversation.
 - c. Supporting the political party or candidates closest to the moral and spiritual standards of Scripture
 - d. Responding to newspaper editorials from a Christian moral and value system
 - e. Use of petition to focus public opinion on issues in order to force politicians to act on them
 - f. Holding public demonstrations that are legal and do not disturb public order to show support or disfavor for certain policies.
E.g. abortion, obscenity laws, trans-gender, etc.
 - g. Lobbying through extra-church organizations in order to influence pending legislation from a Christian viewpoint

II. Important Considerations for Christian Social Ethics

A. Paul and other apostles:

1. Seem to show no direct involvement in politics, but show the Christian's _____ to the state (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-17).
2. Emphasize the evangelization of the lost and edification of the saved through the local church more than social action outside of God's salvatory purpose. 2 Tim. 3:15-17 cf. 1 Cor. 9:16; Col. 1:28.
3. Recognize _____ callings and vocations for different believers
Note the emphasis on individual calling in 1 Cor. 7, esp. v-v. 7, 20, 21-22, 21; Gal. 2:7-9.
Col. 4:14, "Luke, the beloved physician"
Acts 10-11 – Cornelius, a soldier
Acts 13:6-12 – Sergius Paulus, a pro-counsel
Acts 18:1-3 – Aquila, Priscilla and Paul were tent-makers
 - a. How much time can an evangelist, preacher of the gospel, missionary or pastor-teacher afford to spend in social actions without neglecting his divinely given calling?
What is the most effective way to live my life and time for the Lord?
 - b. A Christian may properly be a professional politician, social worker, physician, lawyer, ecologist, judge, warden, serviceman, businessman, counselor or mass-media communicator and justifiably be **more** involved in these area of social action than a full-time Christian worker.

B. Social action of the Old Testament - From Genesis through the Theocracy, Kingdoms, Exile & Return

C. Social action in the Gospels & Acts (transitional period from Old Covenant to New Covenant)

D. Social action within the church (the "one another" commands) & care for neighbors