

HERE WE STAND

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Here We Stand: Introduction/Preface

Revival and reform serve as the double helix of the Churches of God, General Conference (CGGC) DNA. These two priorities date back to the birth of the CGGC in 1830 during America's Second Great Awakening. They originate in Christ's commission to his disciples to carry on his work of redemption (Matthew 28:16-20, John 20:21). The reason why the Church, including the CGGC, exists is to help people everywhere experience Jesus' love and find abundant life in Him (John 10:10). This is accomplished similarly to Jesus who ministered through teaching, preaching and healing (Matthew 9:35), and it encompasses both spiritual and temporal dimensions as James points out in his letter (James 2:14-18).

John Winebrenner (1797-1860) and other first generation CGGC ministers promoted and participated in the reform causes of their day including the anti-slavery movement, temperance, Sabbath (Sunday) school and higher education, care for the poor and destitute, etc. These issues and more found voice in CGGC publications like *The Gospel Publisher* (1835-1845) and *The Church Advocate* (1845 to the present). Furthermore local churches and individuals engaged in activities like the Underground Railroad, providing for widows and orphans, establishing academies for higher learning, etc. In 1844 the CGGC published a manifesto of its mission "*pro bono publico*" (for the public good) in The History of All Religious Denominations and declared its revival and reform agenda right alongside its doctrinal beliefs. The following year the churches came together in Pittsburgh to organize a General Conference based on those twenty-seven statements of faith and practice.

Ever since its creation in 1845 the CGGC has maintained its commitment to biblical integrity and social responsibility. The dedication to scriptural authority was most recently reaffirmed at the 2013 General Conference session in Findlay, OH with the adoption of the updated We Believe document. The acceptance of this fresh doctrinal statement, however, raises a huge question about contemporary living. Given these beliefs, what are the appropriate Christian responses to the social and moral issues of the twenty-first century? Church members want to know, and even the general public is watching to see, how the Church reacts. To that end the CGGC Administrative Council felt it would be helpful to create a document that focused upon these issues, offering a biblical and practical approach in response.

A writing team from across the CGGC was appointed to prepare a draft for consideration. This is that document. The team reviewed past position statements made by the General Conference (see Appendix below) and considered contemporary culture to develop a list of pertinent topics. The next step was to assign writers and work through various drafts and redrafts. The goal was to create statements reflecting positions generally espoused across the CGGC that are clear, practical, brief as possible, and solidly rooted in scripture. A uniform approach for all topics was developed to provide consistency in structure and presentation. Given the constantly changing nature of the verbiage used in some areas, the writers and the team as a whole attempted to utilize the most current terminology, but request the reader's indulgence and understanding on this matter. Scripture quotations come from the New

International Version (2011 edition) unless otherwise noted in the text. Abbreviated citations in the text will point the reader to the “Selected References” section at the end of the document.

Ultimately the purpose of this Here We Stand document is to provide insight into the CGGC’s biblical understanding of contemporary issues facing the Church and how congregations and individual Christians can respond. More broadly it will serve as an information and conversation piece for any enquiring person. It is not intended to be used as a weapon against those whose beliefs or behavior may not align with the positions articulated here. This is a conversation piece for individuals and the church to pray, explore scripture and seek the Lord’s direction in matters of faith and practice in this world. Neither is this document intended as a fence to keep the world out of the Church, but quite the contrary. It is designed to serve as a gateway for open conversation and direct ministry in and to the world. God’s people must be “salt and light” in their communities (Matthew 5:13-16). This reality lies at the heart of Jesus’ mission and is the incarnation of his Gospel. Here We Stand is therefore a call for the CGGC, corporately and individually, to engage the world and not shy away from the issues of culture and contemporary life or become a mere by-stander. *Soli Deo gloria!*

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1. Abortion

What Is the Issue?

We believe that every human life has value, and every human is made in the image of God including life in the womb. Consequently, to terminate the life of the unborn whether through abortion or any other means is a violation of the Sixth Commandment, "You shall not murder." We as the Church choose to affirm the right to life of every human being from conception, and we deplore and oppose the concept, practice and legalization of abortion.

What Does Scripture Say?

"So, God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves along the ground.'" (Genesis 1:27-28)

And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man." (Genesis 9:5-6)

"Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." (Psalm 51:5)

"Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gate." (Psalm 127:3-5)

"For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be." (Psalm 139:13-16)

Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter." (Isaiah 5:20)

"The word of the LORD came to me saying, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.'" (Jeremiah 1:4-5)

"Then little children were brought to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked those who brought them. Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.'" (Matthew 19:13-14)

"When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit." (Luke 1:41)

How Do We Understand This?

A new human life begins with the union of sperm and egg, forming a zygote, a unique, genetically distinct human person, distinct from the mother. Therefore, all human life is sacred. This understanding is the foundation of what we believe as the Churches of God with regard to abortion.

How Do We Understand This?

Life begins at conception and a fetus is a life that is distinct from the mother. From the time a child is conceived he possesses unique DNA that will determine hair color, eye color, height, sex and other physical attributes.

All human life is sacred regardless of the level of development, size, location, or viability outside the womb. Therefore, Abortion is an act that deliberately brings an end to the life of a human being. This is what the Bible calls murder (Exodus 20:13). Any attack on a human who bears the image of God is an attack on the creator Himself.

Scripture confirms the personhood of a fetus even from the time they are in their mother's womb. David says in Psalm 51 that he was sinful from the time he was in his mother's womb. The question raised here is how could a fetus be considered sinful if they are not a person? God told Jeremiah that he knew him before he was formed in the womb and had already set him apart to be appointed as a prophet to the nations. When Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, her child leaped in her womb. These passages make it clear that God sees a fetus as having personhood.

How Can We Respond (Minister)?

We encourage our churches to take an active role in halting the blight of abortion in our society by responsibly interpreting and teaching God's word on this issue. Christians need to help others inside and outside the Church to understand the value placed on human life by God. We need to offer the grace of God, the love of Christ, and the counsel of the Holy Spirit to all whose lives are affected by abortion. We stand against violence towards and personal attacks upon those who perform or who have had abortions. We need to assist parents in finding a worthy home for an unwanted child and to offer to both men and women considering abortion the alternatives of life. Partnering with a crisis pregnancy center can be a wonderful resource for the local church.

Since life is precious to God, both the life of the unborn child as well as the mother's life must be respected and protected. When the life of a mother is threatened by the birth of a child the Church must support the mother with the grace and love of God, encouraging the mother to preserve life to the furthest extent possible.

The Church has the responsibility to teach its members that life begins at conception. The Church must also emphasize the tragic consequences of a society that neglects to respect the miracle of life. In a culture that promotes the idea that children are a burden and a hindrance to one's success and progress, the Church must teach that children are a blessing and a precious gift from God. In the case of those that are unable or unwilling to raise a child, the Church must be willing to assist parents in finding homes for unwanted children. It is the responsibility of the Church to help solve the problem of unwanted pregnancies.

Both men and women are affected by abortion. Because salvation is a gift of God the Church can and must offer forgiveness to all who confess their sins (1 John 1:9). Because God extends an invitation to begin anew in Jesus Christ the Church has an opportunity and an obligation to walk with individuals as they seek and experience healing and restoration. Responsible Christians help others understand the value of human life. At the same time, they always extend an offer of new life in Christ to any who will receive it.

2. The Abuse of Alcohol

What Is the Issue?

The abuse of alcohol is widespread, supported by powerful and attractive advertising with an accompanied rise in both death and crime.

What Does Scripture Say?

“Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise” (Proverbs 20:1).

“Everything is allowable to me, but not everything is profitable. Everything is allowable to me, but to nothing will I become a slave” (1 Corinthians 6:12).

“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

“Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak” (1 Corinthians 8:9).

“But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love” (Galatians 5:13).

“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18).

“Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaints? Who has needless bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes? Those who linger over wine . . . Do not gaze at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly! In the end it bites like a snake and poisons like a viper” (Proverbs 23:29-32).

How Do We Understand This?

First we remember the twofold concern of scripture in these matters. On the one hand we are to be involved in bringing healing to those caught in situations of drug and alcohol abuse. And secondly, we must remember that our witness to the wholeness Christ can guide us in personal decisions in all matters.

First, we remember the twofold concern of Scripture in these matters. On the one hand, we are to be involved in bringing healing to those caught in situations of alcohol abuse. And secondly, we must remember that our witness to the wholeness of life in Christ can guide us in personal decisions in all matters.

Scripture is clear that the abuse of alcohol to the point of inebriation is sin and can lead additionally to enslavement to addiction. At the same time, we remember that Jesus was repeatedly attacked for associating with sinners and he defended himself by declaring that it is not the well who need a physician but the sick. As his people, we are to be involved in bringing healing to those caught in alcohol abuse.

Jesus consumed wine, as did the Apostles, and the ~~entire~~ Jewish culture observed no prohibition on the consumption of alcohol. The Gospel of John conveys the details of Jesus' attendance at a wedding at Cana in Galilee where he turned water into wine. Temperance is assumed as an underlying and general observance in Jewish society. Hebrew Scriptures are filled with disapproval for drunkenness (Proverbs 23:29-32).

The biblical record portrays abuse of alcohol negatively. Drunkenness is repeatedly condemned as being foolish, and yet alcohol consumption is not forbidden, rather it was taken as a given in the Gospels. In fact, it was not necessary for the biblical writers to overtly address alcohol use until the gospel was carried into the Greco-Roman culture.

Paul writes guidelines to the newly formed and predominantly Gentile churches for a new society which bears the identity of Christ, the Church. Drunkenness is directly addressed in 1 Corinthians 5:11; 6:10; 11:21; Ephesians 5:18; Romans 13:13; and 1 Thessalonians 5:7. These verses unequivocally condemn drunkenness and the immoral behavior generally associated with it. Moreover, drunkenness was prohibited in all who were leaders in the church: elders, deacons, deaconesses (Titus 1:7; 2:3; 1 Timothy 3:8). These leaders were to provide an example that the church at large could follow.

So concerned was Paul with new moral standards which are in keeping with the believer's new identity in Christ that he issued the House Rule (Ephesians 5:22-6:9; Colossians 3:18-4:1). Moreover, drunkenness was prohibited in all who were leaders in the church: elders, deacons, deaconesses (Titus 1:7; 2:3; 1 Timothy 3:8). These leaders were to provide an example that the church at large could follow.

Clearly, the Bible teaches temperance, but does it teach abstinence? Not directly. It does, however, provide that the guiding principle for Christian freedom is genuine love and concern for the body of Christ. Freedom must be expressed and tempered by love. Peter provides the interpretative lens for us concerning all issues pertaining to Christian freedom in 1 Peter 2:16-17: "Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves. Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor."

Paul concurs, "You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love" (Galatians 5:13). He further writes to the Corinthians that "everything was permissible to [him]" but that he "would not be mastered by anything" (1 Corinthians 6:12). Again, Paul states the principle of charitable love governing freedom when he says, "If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy someone for whom Christ died" (Romans 14:15).

How Can We Respond (Minister)?

Within the Churches of God, there is wider acceptance of moderate consumption of alcohol than was true earlier in our history, but the Church still issues the biblical mandate of temperance and warns against the dangers of alcohol, reminding all that love is to rule all our actions.

Following the dictates of Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 8, our churches would be wise to pursue a no-alcohol policy on church property and apart from communion wine, alcohol has no place at official church functions.

The Church needs to teach its people about the dangers of alcohol ~~and drugs, particularly the dangers of~~ abuse, and to hold its own people to wisdom in these matters. It should particularly hold its leaders accountable in the areas of abuse of alcohol ~~and drugs~~. But in all cases, the Church needs to support persons who have an addiction through counseling, prayer and loving fellowship, coming alongside its people when these situations arise.

The church can also provide financial and facility support to a host of recovery groups that share its basic Christian values.

A further word to church leaders on this matter: The Apostle Paul from 1 Corinthians 8 discusses his position as a leader on eating meats offered to idols in light of the fact that he, as a leader, desired to set the highest example in matters regarding Christian freedom. He knew that as a Christian it was not sinful to eat meat offered to idols just as we believe it is not intrinsically sinful to drink a glass of wine. But he also knew that “Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled” (1 Corinthians 8:7). Although Paul knew he was “free” to eat meat offered to idols, he also knew that this behavior as a leader could become detrimental to others who, emboldened by his “example,” might “be destroyed by (his) your knowledge” (v. 11). His conclusion?

“But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do. Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, won’t he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall. (1 Corinthians 8:8-13)

As a leader, Paul willingly refused to exercise his freedom to eat meat offered to idols lest some Christian might see his example as a leader and come to spiritual harm. In our society, eating meat offered to idols is no longer an issue, but in the United States, alcohol abuse is an issue. There is no specific biblical mandate for abstinence, but perhaps our leaders should seriously consider abstinence as a critical piece of their leadership witness in their current cultural climate.

3. Adoption

What Is the Issue?

There are many orphans in the world today who need parents who will not only love them, but who will also teach them about God and His Kingdom.

What Does Scripture Say?

“Do not take advantage of the widow or the fatherless” (Exodus 22:22).

“Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed” (Psalm 82:3).

“Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow” (Isaiah 1:17).

“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world” (James 1:27).

“A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families” (Psalm 68:5-6a).

“Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching. They will be a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck” (Proverbs 1:8-9).

“Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it” (Proverbs 22:6).

“Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother. This girl, who was also known as Esther, was lovely in form and features, and Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died” (Esther 2:7).

“Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these’” (Matthew 19:14).

“Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Romans 8:23).

“For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves” (Ephesians 1:46).

How Do We Understand This?

God loves all people. He cares about the weak and vulnerable. Even when we sinned, He had a plan in place to restore us. Since we, as Christ’s followers, have been adopted by God, we realize firsthand the value of adoption.

God's unconditional love for us provides us with an understanding of how to love others unconditionally. As Christians, married couples and single persons remain open to the possibility of God's call to adopt. Adoption is an act of trust in which Christians accept God's call to adopt and depend upon Him for the strength and guidance He will provide.

The purpose of adoption is to provide a child with a loving family and a stable home environment that they might not otherwise know. Perhaps the most important discipleship takes place within the family, and this includes adoptive parents/children as well as biological families. When an adopted child is raised in the faith, they enter into the spiritual legacy of their adopted family. This fact is confirmed by Jesus' own life as he was identified as the Messiah whose ancestry to David and Abraham was traced through the lineage of his adopted father, Joseph.

How Can We Respond (Minister)?

The Church's role is to help all parents. During dedication services, members of the Church promise to assist parents as they raise their children. The Church agrees to raise children in a loving, Christian environment.

In situations of adoption, the Church plays an even greater role. Through times of transition, the Church comes alongside adoptive parents and their child (ren) to offer needed prayer and support. The Church is called to extend the love of Christ both to families who are involved in the process of adoption and to orphans around the world.

Because of the great need for adoptive families, the church could encourage potential parents to consider adoption by inviting social service agencies to speak; raising awareness of the need; and praying openly for children in need of stable homes. Many communities have local family service agencies who would be glad to help congregations provide visibility for the need for adoption.

Likewise, the congregation can rally around adoptive parents. Congregations can not only pray for parents, but listen, offer periodic childcare and other supports, and invest in families. This type of ministry brings needed relief to all parents, but especially to those who "raise someone else's child," considering the great cost to adopt. The congregation as the family of God is vital in supporting families, and especially adoptive parents.

4. Artificial Intelligence

What is the Issue?

As the rapid advancements in technology continue to shape our world, one topic that has garnered significant attention is artificial intelligence (AI). Despite potential positive advances for society, AI displaces human thinking, production, creativity, relationships, and interactions.

What Does Scripture Say?

Scripture teaches us about the nature of humanity and our relationship with God. "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27).

Scripture emphasizes the importance of wisdom and discernment. "The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding" (Proverbs 4:7).

How Do We Understand This?

Humans are distinct creations of God, endowed with dignity, value, and the capacity for creativity and moral reasoning. Our worth is derived from the fact that we were created in the image of a holy God. Anything humanity creates will pale in comparison to what God has already created. Therefore, AI should not be seen as a replacement for the human mind. It may be used as a valuable tool, but here too AI has its limitations. It must not be used to manufacture relationships between humans and machines. Furthermore, wisdom is the result of experience and that cannot be artificially generated.

Christianity is grounded in the material world. The ordinances are material. Worship is material. Therefore, any worship "community" that seeks to eliminate corporate worship or replace it with virtual worship including the use of avatars should be approached with skepticism.

How Can We Respond (Minister)?

As we consider the development and use of AI, we must ensure that it aligns with the biblical understanding of human dignity and does not diminish the value of human life. It is likely that the use of AI will change the way the world does a lot of things like delivering goods, engaging customers, or handling finances. The Church needs to remind people displaced by this technology that their value was never found in what they were able to provide society.

The Church is reminded to approach technological innovations with careful consideration, seeking to understand their implications for society, morality, and ethics. Tools are often neutral while the motives behind their implementation are not. Churches should not negate their responsibility to dispense wisdom through shared experience. Churches accomplish this by facilitating relationship growth centered in Christ.

As AI technologies continue to be developed, the Church ought to educate herself concerning this technology, considering its potential benefits and risks. The Church encourages communities to approach AI with wisdom, recognizing both its potential and its limitations. Like any tool the Church utilizes to engage the world, it should be utilized with dialogue, prayer, and reflection seeking to steward technology in a manner that honors God.

5. The Care of Children

What Is the Issue?

Children around the world are being abused and it breaks the heart of God. The Church needs to speak on their behalf because they have no voice of their own.

What Does Scripture Say?

“[Jesus] called a little child and had him stand among his disciples. ‘Whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea’” (Matthew 18:2, 5-6).

“See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven. Your father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost” (Matthew 18:10-11, 14).

“‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.’ And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them” (Mark 10:14b-16).

How Do We Understand This?

From Jesus’ words and actions we learn that children are very near and dear to the heart of God. Their innocent, trusting nature is akin to the state of man before the Fall and an example to every adult of the essence of faith. Jesus words could hardly be clearer. To enter his kingdom requires one to be as a little child, to be born again in faith believing. The warning against child abuse is no less clear. The Lord will judge all those who cause a child to be turned from God’s way and be lost. And if God cursed the one who tempted Adam and Eve to sin, will he not also hold those accountable who abuse innocent children?

The Church needs to be in the forefront of child advocacy if it is to be true to Jesus’ teaching and example. Whether the issue is physical, mental or spiritual abuse and/or neglect, the Church needs to be involved in prevention, intervention, and subvention. Such ministry starts within the congregation but extends outward to the local community and beyond, even around the globe. The Church united in mission can help redeem the lives of children, one child at a time, by introducing them to the love of Jesus and giving them hope for a better future.

How Can We Respond (Minister)?

Some child advocacy needs will vary from one local community to the next while others will be common to many locations, even crossing cultures. Hence, each congregation will need to pray and determine where and how the Lord would have them minister. Each is encouraged to take a hands-on approach and follow a strategy of involvement, helping children both locally and globally. What follows are a few suggestions based on what others have done. Following are ideas to spark discussion and help stimulate new ideas for ministry to and for children.

- Train everyone who works with children in the church to recognize the signs of possible abuse. This is not a suggestion but a mandatory legal responsibility in most states as is reporting abuse or suspected abuse.
- Have church policies in place regarding child abuse (background checks, response plans, etc.)
- Remember the moral and spiritual responsibility of the Church to protect children does not preclude ministry to abusers (or those accused of abuse) and their families. The Church needs to facilitate self-reporting and be there for all, not abandoning any to the criminal justice system.
- Make the church facility more child-friendly and safe. Ask children and their parents or guardians what they might like to see.
- As a church, adopt a local school and enlist volunteers to help with whatever may be needed.
- Provide back-to-school supplies for the kids and/or help with needed classroom supplies.
- Become a CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) volunteer in your local community.
- Set up community after school activities or weekend events for kids and/or youth.
- Identify a need for children in the community and call local leaders together to address it.
- Sponsor students or a church school on a CGGC mission field (Bangladesh, Haiti, India, etc.).
- Partner with local/regional/national/international organizations to address child exploitation worldwide in the sex trade, sweat shops, etc.

6. Civil Disobedience

What is the Issue?

God calls us generally to submit to civil government; however, what shall we do when Caesar's will runs contrary to God's will?

What Does Scripture Say?

Scripture provides numerous examples of conflicts between God's people and civil authorities as well as instruction on how to handle those conflicts. Christians are called to obey, honor and respect civil authorities because God has placed them over us (Romans 13:1-7). When the Pharisees questioned Jesus on whether it was appropriate to pay taxes to Caesar, Jesus told them to "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's" (Mark 12:17).

Exodus 1 provides the first example of civil disobedience when the Hebrew midwives disobeyed Pharaoh's order to kill newborn boys. In Daniel 1, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refuse to eat meat sacrificed to idols in violation of God's law, but are able to negotiate an agreeable solution with King Nebuchadnezzar's official which allowed them to obey Jewish dietary laws. In Daniel 3, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego respectfully refuse to obey King Nebuchadnezzar's decree that they worship a golden image of the king. Given the choice of abandoning worship of God and death in a fiery furnace, they obey God, choose the furnace and are saved from the fire. In Daniel 6, Daniel continues to pray to God in violation of the law and is thrown into the lion's den as punishment, where God saves him.

There are also several similar examples in the New Testament. In Acts 4:1-22, Peter and John publicly preach the Gospel and are threatened by the Sanhedrin. In Acts 5:17-41, the Apostles are beaten by the Sanhedrin for preaching the Gospel. In both cases, the Apostles continue to preach. In Acts 16:16-40 Paul and Silas are arrested, beaten and jailed for offending local custom by preaching the Gospel and casting out a demon. While in jail, an earthquake destroys the jail, but they do not escape, allowing them to convert the jailer. Paul and Silas announce themselves as Roman citizens in order to make use of their additional freedoms allowing them to continue their missionary journey. In Acts 24 and 25, Paul is placed on trial and appeals to Caesar in order to continue to spread the Gospel.

How Do We Understand This?

We believe that the Bible teaches a process to address situations in which civil authorities force the Christian to choose between obeying God or man. Because there are many different situations in which conflicts could arise, this article will not address any specific conflict. Rather, it will seek to provide a framework Christians can use to address such conflicts with civil authorities.

An important question to consider is whether an action is a matter of imprudence or a matter of immorality. In the world of politics and government there are many things government officials may ask us to do that we find to be foolish policies, yet there may not be anything immoral about obeying the foolish law. Before a Christian considers refusal to obey the law, they should ask themselves why they do not like the law in question. If it is just bad policy, the Christian should obey and seek remedy through the political process. If obedience to a particular law would be sinful, the Christian should seek accommodation through Caesar's agent. As Daniel did, we should first seek out the official or officials tasked with enforcing the law and seek a mutually agreeable solution to the conflict.

As we live in an increasingly post Christian and anti-Christian culture, Acts 4:18-20 becomes pivotal in our reactions and mindset. As we seek to do good, it is increasingly perceived in a negative light. The secular world pushes for Christian activity to be kept within the confines of the Church, but God commands us to live out the Christian faith publicly. While evangelical Christian ministry is often taken as intolerance towards others, we are motivated by obedience to God and goodwill toward our fellowman. As Peter and John replied in Acts 4, we must obey God and His commands to us rather than human laws.

Christians should utilize the legal process to protect their rights under the law. Like Paul, we may seek judicial remedies to protect ourselves from officials who may seek to compel us to violate our conscience. If that is unsuccessful, we may appeal to ensure that we utilize our rights in furtherance of the Kingdom of God.

As a last resort, Christians should respectfully refuse to obey Caesar and instead obey God. There are occasions such as those encountered by Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and the Apostles where it is impossible to obey both man and God. Occasionally God's people must choose between man and God. Our response should be like Peter and the other apostles when they replied: "We must obey God rather than human beings!" (Acts 5:29). Choosing God over man may result in temporal punishment but will result in eternal glory.

How Can We Respond (Minister)?

Throughout history, Christians have been ostracized, fined, jailed, beaten and killed for following Christ. Some have been persecuted for preaching the Gospel, others for refusing to worship other gods, others for helping the poor, and still others for refusing to take actions or spread ideas that are contrary to biblical guidance. As the people of God we must respond appropriately.

- We will pray for Christians around the world who are persecuted.
- We will pray for our leaders (1 Timothy 2:1-3).
- We will seek redress of injustice on behalf of the oppressed.
- We will encourage and assist members of congregations as they suffer for their fidelity to Christ.
- When a conflict arises where we must choose to obey God or obey Caesar, we will seek to find a resolution to the matter by determining whether a conflict truly exists and then by seeking accommodation from the civil authorities.

When there is no accommodation and we must choose whom to obey, may we, like Thomas More declare that we are "the king's good servant, and God's first" and like the Apostles rejoice at being "counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name" (Acts 5:41).

7. Creation Stewardship

What Is the Issue?

The natural world is more at risk due to humanity's poor care of God's creation.

What Does Scripture Say?

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good" (Genesis 1:1, 31a).

"The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" (Genesis 2:7, 15).

"What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas" (Psalm 8:4-8).

"The highest heavens belong to the Lord, but the earth he has given to man" (Psalm 115:16).

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:1-3).

"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God." (Romans 8:18-21)

"Then I saw 'a new heaven and a new earth,' for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea." (Revelation 21:1)

How Do We Understand This?

Scripture repeatedly affirms the words of God at the beginning that creation is "good." In the words of King David in Psalm 24, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it." God made it and as the creator everything belongs to him. And yet as the texts above indicate, God entrusted the use and care of the earth to humankind. The natural world is a sacred trust. In all trust arrangements the trustee (in this case humankind) is accountable to the real owner (God) for the stewardship of the trust (the earth).

Unfortunately, humanity has a consistently poor record of exploiting God's creation and the natural world provided for us for personal and economic gain. This greed and ignorance has led to the extinction of species, diminished habitats, fouling of waters, and deforestation. Awareness in recent years

has increased. We encourage all believers to educate themselves and seek out scientific solutions for the care of God's good creation.

A further tragedy has been a failure to read scripture within context. This has led to the idea that creation is not important. Cries of, "It's all going to burn up anyways," and "This is not my home," persist despite the trajectory of scripture moving from creation to new creation. Passages such as 2 Peter 3:10-13 or Revelation 21:1 (quoted above) have been used to suggest that God's creation is temporary, but reading these apocalyptic texts within the context of the Old Testament's warning of the "day of the Lord" make it clear that the language in these passages, "Is intended to communicate *judgment*, not necessarily annihilation." (Richter, p. 99) These passages must be read in the light of God's move throughout history as recorded for us in his word.

How Can We Respond (Minister)?

It is important the Church avoid the politicization and polarization the conversation on the environment sometimes engenders. Of all people, the Church needs to serve as caretakers in the garden of the Lord. Corporately and individually, she can make a difference by taking a pro-active approach.

- Seek out scientific solutions for faithful environmental stewardship.
- Promote environmental awareness in the teaching/preaching ministry of the church.
- Encourage recycling and set up internal church systems to do so. Almost anything can be recycled, reused or repurposed: Bibles, books, clothing, furniture, literature, toys, etc.
- Discourage or minimize the use of Styrofoam and other products that are not recyclable and end up in a landfill. Instead use biodegradable products (cups, plates, etc.) and/or reusable ones.
 - Encourage the use of reusable water bottles rather than single-use plastic bottles.
- Teach people to make a personal difference by not trashing the environment and by picking up after those who do. Provide waste cans around the church and community for people to use.
- Promote and participate in community and roadside litter and trash pick-up opportunities as individuals and/or a church. Adopt a highway, neighborhood, street, house, etc. and clean it up.
- Turn the church property into a "Garden-of-Eden" to inspire appreciation for flowers and plants.
- Sponsor community gardens on church property. Produce can be used as a missional outreach or to benefit members. Include all ages in the project.
- Sponsor and host organizations that promote environmental awareness such as scouting troops.
- Utilize hiking, camping, and retreat events to get all ages out into God's creation.
- Support as may be appropriate organizations devoted to conservation and environmental issues.

8. The Church's Ministry to Families and Individuals

What Is the Issue?

In a complicated and changing society, single individuals, married couples and families are in danger of not being ministered to by the Church. Three institutions rooted in the Bible and shown as coming from God are the Family, the Government and the Church. The family is in danger of being altered by a secular, changing and non-biblical philosophy which is increasingly being encoded into law.

What Does Scripture Say?

Paul gives the rudiments of family life briefly in Ephesians 5:21-6:4. The family is one way God shows Himself to a child (Genesis 4). Love and security come from the parents, providing a picture of the loving nature of God. These concepts are transferred in the child's mind to his or her Heavenly Father. However, many of these concepts are missing in "modern" families.

Paul also discusses singleness as a legitimate alternative to marriage (1 Corinthians 7). Single people, by choice or situation, need to be ministered to by the Church as well. Single people are part of the church family and as such are to be realizing, discovering and using both their gifts and the unique opportunities in the body of Christ. They can be effectively involved in ministry because of their situation and ability to minister in many settings. Single persons can and have lived fulfilled lives in the body of believers. Single people may be young, mature, never married, divorced or living alone after the death of their spouse. Each situation has special ministry needs from loneliness to fellowship and friendship opportunities, as well as ministry involvement.

Single people as well as married persons may need help in how to channel legitimate sexual appetites. Paul speaks about this in 1 Corinthians 7:7-9, 25-28, 32-34 and 40. This is an area that has not always been addressed well in the Church in the past.

How Do We Understand This?

In relation to the family, the Church has much to say that will not be heard from any other sector. Sexuality is good and part of God's creation plan. Intimacy is a gift given to one's spouse (1 Corinthians 7:16). Celibacy is also a gift (1 Corinthians 7:7). The Church needs to support those who choose marriage and those who feel led to singleness and celibacy.

There are biblical principles for successful families which include sexual purity and stewardship, understanding law principles and gospel freedom, holy living, as well as kindness and forgiveness in the family unit and in wider relationships.

Love is non-coercive. A loving relationship is to be mutually beneficial between husbands and wives (Ephesians 5:21, 33). It is to be free of physical or emotional coercion.

While there are different configurations to families in our churches and communities, the idea of same sex unions or marriages is to be biblically resisted as inconsistent with nature, the Scriptures, and reason.

Financial responsibility from a biblical perspective is also important and needs to be taught to parents and modeled for children. This can help with much of the stress in modern life.

How Can We Respond (Minister)?

The ministry of the Church to families includes but is not limited to:

- Preparation of couples for marriage using biblical guidelines.
- Biblically based divorce recovery for spouses and children.
- Counseling and specialized referrals for those in troubled marriages.
- Teaching and mentoring when families are blending.
- Parenting workshops and groups.
- Ministry to single parent families. The Church is uniquely positioned to provide an extended family to those who struggle because of death, divorce or abandonment. The body of believers can fill in the voids left by the brokenness of our society in areas of mentorship and inclusion. This is true in many other practical ways as well. This ministry is to both the parent and to the children.
- Helping families living in a non-biblical context move to a biblical understanding and outworking of marriage and family.

There are those in the church who struggle with family as a concept, and sexuality in general. The Church can improve its ministry to those who struggle with the biblical teaching on heterosexual marriage and family.

The Church has opportunities to help those with gender issues to function in victory and holiness. Often to those struggling with heterosexual and/or same sex temptations the Church's ministry appears to emphasize negative or prohibitive teachings. It should be recognized that temptation is not sin, but rather the acting out of the temptation which is sinful. Helping believers to live fulfilled lives without sinning sexually is a task the Church can embrace. The Church needs to hold out the possibility and availability of victory over temptation for both the married and unmarried (James 4:7, 1 Corinthians 6:11).

There are also the future potential families in the Church, for example, college students, young single adults in the labor force, single military personnel, etc. The Church could provide opportunities for young people to meet in a wholesome atmosphere for fellowship and friendship which could lead in some cases to marriage. Teaching about relationships and marriage before young believers are married helps them plan for a biblical relationship. This is also needed for those who are divorced and older single adults as well. Ministry and modeling for blended families is also appropriate. Mentoring couples can learn to help engaged, troubled and newly married couples.

With increasing stress on families and relationships not to mention attacks on Biblical morality, the Church must take the offensive in teaching and modeling biblical marriage and sexuality as well as offering practical guidelines for successful living as couples, families and singles.

9. The Disenfranchised

What Is the Issue?

Scripture affirms that God's creation is, "very good." However, due to sin, many people experience tyranny, hatred, and persecution. War, famine, and disease affect millions around the world, and economic and educational disparity make it difficult for those impoverished by their circumstances to find relief. Slavery and indentured servitude remain rampant, and despite civil rights efforts, racism and xenophobia are ubiquitous. Many people experience oppression, discrimination, neglect, and abandonment, and all too often they are those who are already suffering financial hardship or homelessness. Persons, particularly refugees, women, and children, are pursued by predators. These are the disenfranchised, and they often find themselves without advocates and defenders.

What Does Scripture Say?

"When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God" (Leviticus 19:33-34).

"He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing. So show your love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. You shall fear the LORD your God; you shall serve Him and cling to Him, and you shall swear by His name" (Deuteronomy 10:18-20).

"The LORD watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked" (Psalm 146:9).

"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?" (Isaiah 58:6-7).

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me'" (Matthew 25:34-40).

"If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth. This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything" (1 John 3:17-20).

“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world” (James 1:27).

How Do We Understand This?

It is the responsibility of the Church to work for justice, human rights, fairness in employment, and respect for all people. It is every Christian’s responsibility to provide assistance to the poor, the hungry, the homeless, the lonely, the abused and abandoned— wherever and whenever they are found and whoever they may be.

How Can We Respond (Minister)?

Each local church has a distinct mission field. In order to carry out our responsibility we should:

- Be knowledgeable of the economic conditions and needs of our communities.
- Be attentive to the conduct of our public officials, educators and law enforcement.
- Advocate and support laws that are just and fair and consistent with our values from Christ.
- Come to the aid of those who have fallen victim to economic conditions, natural disasters, the sin-generated prejudices of their fellow citizenry, and the injustices of those in power.
- Work for civil public dialogue on important issues.
- Advance the work of racial reconciliation.
- Promote the fair treatment of aliens and strangers in our midst.
- Never forget the personal touch of the Church and its people to offer a cup of cold water in Jesus’ name (Matthew 10:42).

10. End of Life Issues (Including Euthanasia)

What Is the Issue?

We live in a time of unprecedented health and medical advancement in the 21st century. Having said this, we still live in a fallen world. Some medical advancements and abilities may be used to end life rather than to seek healing or to make those dying comfortable. The ideas of euthanasia and various forms of assisted suicide are becoming more accepted in society and even in the Church. Increasingly societies and nations legislate on these issues in contradiction to the teaching of God's Word. As Christians who affirm the sanctity of life, these developments pose a host of challenges as we assist people in the process of living and dying.

What Does Scripture Say?

"Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.' So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:26-27).

"Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being" (Genesis 2: 7).

"You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13).

"Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?'" (John 11:25-26).

"It is appointed to each man once to die and then face judgment" (Hebrews 9:27).

How Do We Understand This?

Human beings are created in the image of God. Life itself is a gift of God and it is therefore sacred. God is the initiator, sustainer and finisher of life. God is sovereign and is the one who determines our days. Scriptures teach that we are not to commit murder (homicide) and to willfully take a human life is to usurp God's authority. Euthanasia or assisted suicide is self-murder. It is also against our created nature which is to leave these matters in the hands of our loving God.

A distinction could be drawn between prolonging viable life and delaying inevitable death. Palliative care provides comfort for the terminally ill when life-giving measures are withdrawn and the natural dying process is allowed to take its course. While medical technology may provide means to delay death, godly love may choose to allow the dying process to proceed unhindered. For example, when extraordinary measures might condemn a person to exist in a permanent vegetative state, families should be supported if they choose to yield to God's direction. In such cases, we must not hasten someone's death, but be sure they are comfortable until the Lord calls them home.

We live a day of an increasingly impersonal approach to illness and impending death. There is a substitution of technology and information for personal relationships. It should be emphasized that there is a need for personal, face-to-face ministry to those dealing with end-of-life issues.

The Church has an opportunity to become a champion comforting others (2 Corinthians 1:4). It also has a unique place in teaching what scripture says. Life is from God. Medicine may be used to ease pain (Proverbs 31:6); however, assisted suicide and having a person bypass the process of death is prohibited by Exodus 20:13. In addition, medical intervention must not compromise the life of another, as in some forms of stem cell research and treatment.

In our culture, pain is seen as negative and to be avoided. Scripture indicates that there is a value in the process of suffering (Romans 5:3-5; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; 12:7-10; Philippians 3:10) and even death (John 21:19; Philippians 1:20-21). In hastening death there is the possibility of missing the mystery of God's presence, will, and comfort at the end of life. It is not wrong to refuse medical treatments which would prolong the length but not quality of life. It is also not wrong to seek those treatments.

How Can We Respond (Minister)?

In a day of long life but also of devastating illnesses and life-prolonging treatments how does the Church counsel its people in increasingly complicated issues of life and death? Certainly the Church and its people engage in acts of mercy and comfort toward the sick, the dying and their families, as did Jesus.

In addition, the Church encourages people to:

- Think of eternity in regard to the end of life.
- Write down their wishes concerning life-prolonging procedures in documents like living wills, and advance directives in order to ease pressures on their family members. Explaining and planning for organ donations if applicable can be a way to help families see positive outcomes in their difficult situation.
- Prepare personal financial affairs ahead of time for their families.
- Preplan funeral arrangements if possible. This would include wishes for the service as well as meaningful memories they would like shared.
- Plan for healthcare needs of age and infirmity which may include home health care or nursing home care.
- Address the issue of chronic pain in holistic ways. This would include physical therapy, psychological counseling, pain management options, family discussion, and prayer. The place of chronic pain in choosing medical options and how they would affect longevity is a discussion that needs a spiritual element as well as medical and psychological considerations.

The local congregation and wider Church are invested with the duty and privilege of frequently teaching on these subjects, organizing and utilizing ministries such as parish nursing, and providing competent visitation and hospice ministries for the dying and their families. Grief care would fit here as well. Aftercare and ongoing ministry to families after the funeral, is a necessary task the people of God can be involved in.

11. Gambling

What Is the Issue?

Gambling, particularly when it is compulsive, leads to poverty and destruction of the family, and centers a person on the love of money contrary to what Jesus commanded his followers.

What Does Scripture Say?

There are a number of scriptures that speak to the motives that lead to gambling:

“Dishonest money dwindles away, but he who gathers money little by little makes it grow” (Proverbs 13:11).

“A stingy man is eager to get rich and is unaware that poverty awaits him” (Proverbs 28:22).

“Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless” (Ecclesiastes 5:10).

“No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money” (Matthew 6:24).

“There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need” (Acts 4:34).

“People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs” (1 Timothy 6:9-10).

“Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you’” (Hebrews 13:5).

How Do We Understand This?

The Bible emphasizes a number of truths that conflict with gambling. The Bible admonishes people to work creatively and for the benefit of others (Ephesians 4:28), while gambling fosters a something-for-nothing attitude. The Bible condemns materialism (Matthew 6:24–25) while gambling promotes it.

Gambling breeds a form of covetousness, whereas the tenth commandment (Exodus 20:17) admonishes people not to covet. Coveting, greed, and selfishness are often the base emotions that entice individuals to gamble. Christians should be concerned about gambling if for no other reason than the effect it has on the “weaker brother” and how it will affect the compulsive gambler. State-sponsored gambling, as well as gambling web sites, makes it more difficult for compulsive gamblers to reform.

Compulsive gambling destroys the work ethic. Two key biblical passages challenge persons to engage in meaningful work. “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving” (Colossians 3:23). “For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. . . . For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat” (2 Thessalonians 3:7-10).

Gambling destroys families. Gambling is a major cause of family neglect. Many of the social costs associated with gambling come from a get-rich-quick mindset. As people get caught up in a gambling frenzy, they begin to neglect their families. Money spent on lottery tickets or at racetracks is frequently not risk capital but is income that should be spent on family needs. According to 1 Timothy 5:8, a person who refuses to care for his family is worse than an unbeliever. Parents must provide for their children (2 Corinthians 12:14) and eat the bread of their labors (2 Thessalonians 3:12).

Gambling is a form of state-sponsored greed. Romans 13:4 teaches that government is to be a servant of God, providing order in society and promoting public virtue. Legalized gambling undercuts government’s role and subverts the moral fabric of society through greed and selfishness promoted by a state-sponsored vice.

Since gambling often leads to addiction or behaviors which undermine the moral foundations of society and can lead to corruption in government, Christians should approach gambling with great reservation. While the Bible does not strictly condemn gambling in all forms and occasional participation may be an area of personal choice, addictive behavior should be avoided at all times.

How Can We Respond (Minister)?

Biblical stewardship should be taught from the pulpit and congregations would do well to reflect on the fact that we are called to manage the Lord’s resources. To gamble neither honors nor glorifies the Lord whose resources are being squandered.

Those who are addicted to gambling and especially their families need both the support and love of the Church. The courage to confront lovingly and to support through intervention and beyond is invaluable. Counseling resources and pastoral care will show the love of Jesus to those trapped in debilitating behaviors.

Some practical suggestions could include one or more of the following actions.

- Host a Gambler’s Anonymous group in the church facility.
- Provide teaching/preaching on fiscal responsibility and the perils of gambling for individuals, families, the church and the community.
- Work with county and/or state agencies as well as local law enforcement to assist in helping families with gambling & related issues.

12. Human Rights

What Is the Issue?

Humans have regularly trespassed against one another. Rather than putting others above themselves, they have chosen to put themselves above others, resulting in tragic consequences. Instead of recognizing the inherent value of every human being, they have trampled upon one another's God-given human rights.

What Does Scripture Say?

Through the prophet Isaiah, God emphasized the importance of meeting basic human needs by saying, "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter – when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday" (Isaiah 58:6-10).

God created each person in His image and likeness (Genesis 1:26), and cares for all people, meeting the basic needs of both the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45). He acts on behalf of the poor and weak who are overcome by the strong (Ezekiel 34:17-24, Luke 1:46-55). In Christ, God breaks down every barrier that would separate and divide persons (Galatians 3:28). Through His law, God provides peace and wholeness. He sent His Son as a witness of life as it is intended to be lived, who recognized the human rights of those whom society discarded. Following the Resurrection, Christ rendered all authority on earth to His Church to minister and teach in His name (Matthew 28:18-20).

Even those unfamiliar with God's written commandments know humans are to be treated justly (Budziszewski, 38-39). Paul writes, "Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them." (Romans 2:14-15).

The command to love is at the heart of God's approach to the concept of human rights. In both the Old Testament and the New Testament, each individual is instructed to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18b; Matthew 22:39b). Furthermore, "Love does no harm to the neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law" (Romans 13:10). "If you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers" (James 2:9).

How Do We Understand This?

The most basic of all human rights is the gift of *agapé* love, God's sacrificial, self-giving love described by the Apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 13:4-7) and demonstrated by a person who stops and helps a person in need (Luke 10:25-37). All human rights stem from the gift of *agapé* love (Matthew 22:40). *Agapé* love is freely given and freely received. When people sin against one another, they break God's command to love.

The Church, being sensitive to all persons' relationship to God and to one another's needs, must provide for those whose basic needs are not met and must speak on behalf of the poor, the downtrodden, and outcast. The Church needs to be careful that it does not take its definition of human rights from the world, lest it have no transcendent center. The concept of individual human rights has its roots in Scripture, most appropriately, in the word *shalom*. Shalom is usually translated "peace," and comes from a root word meaning "to be healthy, complete, whole, balanced." It describes a life in which one's every need is met, in which a person experiences security, safety and fullness of life, in which one practices justice and is the recipient of justice. Shalom describes life as God intends it to be lived. In the Judeo-Christian perspective all persons are entitled to shalom – and the human rights that make for shalom.

How Can We Respond (Minister)?

We respond by obeying God's command to love one another as Jesus instructed on several occasions (Matthew 7:12, Luke 6:27-36). Through praying for one another and practicing shalom, we intend to impact people's lives in such a way that they are drawn into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

As the salt of the earth and the light of the world, we promote the cause of human rights while opposing sinful behavior. We can become involved in the political process within our communities, and where possible, in the nation and the world in order to change those systems which may create violations of human rights so that all people may experience justice and the gift of agape love before God.

Some practical suggestions for the local church and/or the Church at large could include one or more of the following actions.

- Regularly pray for the kingdom of God to be made real for all people everywhere.
- Establish forums for people to discuss and comprehend basic human rights such as personal liberty, dignity, and well-being based on God's creative intent (*imago dei*) for all mankind.
- Identify human needs in the local community and intervene as may be appropriate:
 - Open the church facility as a place of refuge for the homeless and needy. ○ Sponsor support ministries such as a food and/or clothing bank.
 - Ask public officials and agencies how the church can help the community meet needs.
- Become directly involved in world mission outreach via CGGC Cross Cultural Ministries and/or another such agency:
 - Adopt and support one or more missionaries, fields, sister churches, etc. ○ Support one or more children in third world situations.
 - Send out work teams to make a difference in the local community and beyond.
- Stand up for the powerless and deprived and oppose injustice and discrimination everywhere by advocating for human rights with public officials and working for needed policy change.

13. Human Sexuality

What Is the Issue?

Human sexuality is a wonderful gift from God. However when misused it can lead to harmful consequences. The result is that many people have become ensnared in a multitude of sexual sins including, but not limited to, fornication, homosexuality and pornography.

What Does Scripture Say?

God created human sexuality (Genesis 1:27), and instituted marriage (Genesis 2:18, 24-25), for the mutual good of man and woman (1 Corinthians 7:3-5). God forbids sexual intercourse outside of marriage, whether premarital or extramarital (Proverbs 6:27-29, 1 Corinthians 6:13-18, Ephesians 5:3). God's word condemns all immoral perversions and distortions of human sexuality, including incest (Leviticus 20: 11-12, 19-21), male and female homosexuality (Leviticus 20:13, Romans 1:24-27), plural marriage (Leviticus 20:14), bestiality (Leviticus 20:15, 16), etc.

"Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body" (1 Corinthians 6:18).

How Do We Understand This?

God created sex for the benefit and enjoyment of humankind; however God ordained rules to regulate sex for our own good. The only divinely ordained and beneficial expression of human sexuality is between a husband and wife within the confines of marriage. Any other expression, whether it be lust, pornography, homosexuality, pedophilia, bestiality, adultery, fornication, or any other form of sexual expression outside of a heterosexual marriage covenant is a distortion of human sexuality as God intended and is forbidden. The misuse of sexuality has been an issue throughout human history down to the present with prevailing cultural views clearly at odds with biblical teaching.

How Can We Respond (Minister)?

We must be unflinching in our adherence to biblical teachings on sexual ethics. After all, if the Church abandons the truth, it condemns the world to wallow in the lie that sexual expression outside of a life-long covenantal relationship is ultimately satisfying. At the same time we must be humble and supportive as others seek understanding, repentance and healing. This is particularly important as sexual sin is generally accompanied by a heavy burden of shame, guilt and embarrassment which can impede healing.

We must educate children, teens, and young adults about appropriate sexual behavior as they lay the groundwork for behavioral habits that may be with them for their whole lives. We should demonstrate holiness in order to show a good example. At the same time we must not neglect to minister to older members of our congregations as sexual sin can be a temptation for any person whether young or old.

The Church's response to a sexually immoral culture has been to focus on encouraging family and marriage. While this is appropriate, we should be sure to value celibate singleness as well. In the past we have idolized marriage to the detriment of singleness. We as Christians must seek to further incorporate single individuals into our families and into our churches so that they too may experience community.

14. Human Trafficking

What Is the issue?

Slavery is the process by which, through legal or economic means, human beings are treated as the property of another individual or entity. Although slavery is illegal in every nation, modern day human trafficking persists at its largest capacity in history in all nations for all people groups.

What Does Scripture Say?

As slavery has been a human condition for most if not all of written history, the Bible references its practice and propagation. Indeed, the Bible makes many references to what could be considered the unethical business of slavery among God's chosen people (Exodus 21:1-11,20-21; Leviticus 25:44-46; Luke 12:47; Ephesians 6:5; Colossians 4:1; 1 Timothy 6:1-2; etc.). However, the context in which Israel found itself dealing with slavery would have been much different from most historical slave endeavors, and notably different from most Western contemporary references to the term. The nation of Israel had unique social and economic conditions, shaped by its undertaking of God's law. The slaves of Israel were predominately, if not all, voluntary (Exodus 21:5; Leviticus 25:44; Deuteronomy 15:16) and were heavily focused on economic conditions of the slaves or their families (Leviticus 25:39,47; Deuteronomy 15:12). This focus on economic stability can be seen in the people's desire to uphold the law for the eradication of poverty (Deuteronomy 15:4) and the realization that there would still be hard financial times (Deuteronomy 15:7, 9), with special laws to ensure the hardships of those in distress are lessened (Exodus 23:10; Leviticus 19:10) – in essence, to serve the poor. Even while in slavery, bondservants had opportunity to leave (Exodus 21:26; Leviticus 25:49; Deuteronomy 15:12-13,23:15) and Israel as a whole did not practice what many today would refer to as slavery (Exodus 21:16, Deuteronomy 24:7).

On the contrary, neighbors of ancient Israel and modern day human traffickers practice involuntary, perpetual servitude where worldly power and influence hold persons in deplorable conditions and deprive them of their humanity, an act not of God (Proverbs 22:16; 1 Timothy 1:10). God seeks freedom for his people (Leviticus 25:42) and freedom from slavery to sin (Romans 6:16). All people are equal (Galatians 3:28; Philemon 1:16), made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), and uniquely valued (Jeremiah 1:5; 1 Corinthians 15:22). Furthermore, modern day human trafficking is a perversion of biblical work (Genesis 2:3; Proverbs 13:4; Colossians 3:23; 2 Timothy 2:6) and sex (Genesis 1:27-28; Proverbs 5:18-19; 1 Corinthians 6:18-20,7:3-5). God seeks earthly and eternal freedom for all people (Galatians 5:1; Luke 4:18). God is a God of justice (Proverbs 21:15; Amos 5:24; Romans 12:19; Isaiah 1:17, 30:18, 61:8; Psalm 37:27-29), and the Church is to be his body on earth (1 Corinthians 12), protecting and defending those who are most vulnerable (James 1:27; Matthew 18:10).

How Do We Understand This?

Human trafficking, in both forced labor and sexual exploitation, are perversions of God's perfect creation. In the pursuit of personal ego, power, material wealth, control or other self-elevations human trafficking destroys the humanity of a person and denigrates the image of God in others. This is particularly true of children and young people in desperate situations, where promises of wealth and/or education draw the innocent and unaware into lives of physical and sexual abuse.

How Can We Respond (Minister)?

Because of the immense complexity of the process and the extensive integration of human trafficking into our world, our response must be multifaceted.

- **Crisis Response:** Every day thousands of people are forced into or back into slavery. We, as the body of Christ on earth, must seek to be a voice for the voiceless. The unpleasant truth of the situation must be made clear and the urgency solidified. We must encourage and support government and not-for-profit involvement, as well as our own congregations, to combat this injustice in every form it takes with every resource available.
- **Care and Reconciliation:** We must be a refuge and source of hope for those who have had traumatic life experiences, including human trafficking. Many trafficked victims have been held against their will for many years and may have experienced physical, psychological, and/or spiritual trauma. While many may not realize the depravity of their situations, we ought to seek freedom for them on their behalf nonetheless. Furthermore, we seek not only justice on those who have trafficked in human lives (consumers or suppliers) but redemption. We believe no one is beyond the saving grace of Christ, and want all those who are or have been involved in this trade to be released from the power of sin in their lives.
- **Prevention:** To most effectively and efficiently combat this trade we must seek to destroy it at its source.
 - **Community Development:** Many trafficked victims come from impoverished regions or situations. To eliminate the enticing effect of money and education in the recruitment of victims, we seek to develop communities of safety, economic stability, and education for all peoples of the world.
 - **Home Grown Morals:** Just as adultery begins in the heart, so does the elevation of one person over another. We seek to develop personal, congregational, and community commitments to the image of Christ in man, the value of each individual, and the biblical view on sex. Until the demand for “human products” is diminished, suppliers will find avenues for distribution.
 - **Pillars of Stability:** The more stable an environment the less likely people will be subjected to human trafficking. We thus encourage stable biblical families, involvement in local bodies of believers, and avenues for ignorance-destroying truth.
- **Slave in Christ:** As believers in a perfect God, we strive for all persons to break free, not from just earthly chains, but spiritual chains as well. We therefore seek a biblical form of “slavery” with Christ for all people. In His purchase of a debt we cannot repay, we are bought out of our righteous poverty and brought to live as sons and daughters of God. We seek to bring the hope and vision that only Christ can provide to all people.

15. Immigration

What Is the Issue?

The world is coming to America. It has been so since colonial times. The United State is a nation of immigrants drawn here by unparalleled wealth, opportunity, security and freedom. Yet at this time in history, immigration has become a highly divisive political issue given the large number of persons who have entered the United States illegally. The issue is complicated because many have come fleeing increasingly lawless regions, some made so in part because of the demand for illicit drugs by the citizens of the United States. Nevertheless these immigrants raise security and other concerns for this country. Some of the tension is also fueled by the somewhat erroneous belief that jobs are lost, when in fact many jobs taken by immigrants are those many Americans refuse. America is now a global economy fueled by the efforts of peoples from around the world, but the Church is often divided over whether compassion or national security should be a deciding factor in the immigration debate, as if it were an either-or proposition.

What Does Scripture Say?

“When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God” (Leviticus 19:33-34 ESV).

“He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt” (Deuteronomy 10:18-19).

“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8).

“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me” (Matthew 25:35).

“‘And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:30-31).

“And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God. And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last” (Luke 13:29-30).

“But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?” (1 John 3:17).

“And they sang a new song, saying, ‘Worthy are you to take the scroll and to break its seals; for you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation’” (Revelation 5:9).

How Do We Understand This?

Christians must remember that they are first citizens of the kingdom of God and their highest goal is to connect people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Given the volatile nature of this issue we must be sure that our absolute allegiance to Christ and His gospel is not lost or diluted by political philosophy or ideology or language. We should remember that we are aliens and strangers in a fallen world that dwells in darkness. We are called to the salt of moral character and the light of spiritual truth on this and other issues.

The Bible is very clear about the absolute necessity of ministering to and protecting the sojourner, providing for their physical well-being and defending them against injustice. In fact, the Church's default mode is the law of love as demonstrated by Christ which incorporates kindness and mercy.

Christians also believe human government is ordained by God to promote the well-being of a nation; therefore, we should work to support lawful forms of immigration. This means we oppose those who immigrate to this nation for criminal purposes, but should love and welcome those who come for reasons of freedom from political tyranny and/or economic disaster. We should see it as our responsibility to speak out against political solutions that would callously enable these injustices and work to understand and deal with our nation's complicity and contribution to the destitution of others.

We should also see this great migration as the missionary opportunity it is. As God brings people from other nations and religions into our community, we should seek both to understand them and build respectful relationships that enable the process of redemption of their souls.

How Can We Respond (Minister)?

Churches need to be in prayer for refugees and immigrants around the world. They also need to identify any who live in their community and reach out to them in the name of Jesus, who himself was once a refugee.

Congregations may seek opportunities to provide sanctuary, financial support and care to the outsider and immigrant. In addition, the churches may sponsor refugees and seek to help them become integrated into local culture.

A congregation may open its doors to worship services and/or Bible studies for individuals/congregations from ethnic backgrounds different from that of the local church.

The Church needs to speak for those who have little or no voice and to support acts of social justice and personal care.

Churches need to support and promote the established legal process by helping immigrants achieve resident status and/or citizenship. They can do so by assisting them with any necessary applications and paper work, and by working for change in the process when and where needed.

16. Lesbian, Gay and Transgender Issues

What Is the Issue?

Culture and many churches and Church groups have adopted the view that homosexual behavior and transgenderism are congruent with God's designs for humanity. What is a proper biblical view of these issues?

What Does Scripture Say?

God created man and woman to be complementary to one another (Genesis 1:27).

"A woman must not wear men's clothing, nor a man wear women's clothing, for the LORD your God detests anyone who does this" (Deuteronomy 22:5).

God forbids sexual intercourse outside of marriage, whether premarital or extramarital (Proverbs 6:27-29, 1 Corinthians 6:13-18, Ephesians 5:3). God's word condemns all immoral perversions and distortions of human sexuality, including incest (Leviticus 20: 11-12, 19-21), male and female homosexuality (Leviticus 20:13, Romans 1:24-27), plural marriage (Leviticus 20:14), bestiality (Leviticus 20:15, 16), etc.

"Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body" (1 Corinthians 6:18).

How Do We Understand This?

All of mankind has a bent toward sin, and as a result, each person has certain sins to which he or she is particularly susceptible. Free will, while recognizing a person's susceptibility to sin, does not mean one is condemned to commit that sin. Although no biological link to same sex attraction has been found, such a link (if found) could have a bearing on whether a person is tempted and whether it would make resistance more difficult. However, it is ultimately irrelevant to the sinfulness of homosexual behavior because God has given persons free will to choose to partake in sinful behavior or to submit their bodies as a holy sacrifice to him. This free will is given to all regardless of the particular sin that may tempt them.

As with homosexuality, transgenderism revolves around the issue of God as sovereign creator. God has created each person as either male or female. Whether a particular person is male or female is the sovereign choice of the Creator. As Romans 9:20 says, "But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'"

Each person has certain sins that are more tempting to them than others. For some this may be stealing, for others lying, for others drunkenness, and for others it may be homosexuality or transgenderism. Because of this, we draw a distinction between temptation or urges, and behaviors or fantasies. Simply because a person is tempted by same-sex attraction does not mean that person has sinned. We would encourage those who are tempted by homosexual attraction, just like those tempted by other sexual sin, to flee from it rather than give in to it. After all, as Christians we are not defined by our sin or our temptations, but by our identity in Christ, our risen savior who has given us new life and victory over sin (Romans 7:24-25).

How Can We Respond (Minister)?

We must first recognize that many LGBT individuals have been hurt by those they love, their families, and even their churches. They have felt the sting of rejection and that rejection has left scars. That acknowledgement calls us to love LGBT individuals and show them kindness. While there is a time to confront a person with his or her sin, the person must first know that we love them.

As with any other sin, however, we should lovingly call for repentance. After all, it is not love to hide the truth from someone, particularly as it relates to a destructive lifestyle.

Further, we should celebrate and encourage those individuals who experience same sex attraction, yet resist the temptation to act upon those urges.

Most importantly, we must never enable or encourage homosexual or transgender behavior, whether through conducting same-sex “marriages” or some other practice that could be construed to endorse sexually immoral behavior.

As for society generally, we should continue to speak the truth as to homosexual behavior and transgender behavior. In order to do this we must ensure that our congregants, particularly young people, are trained early-on to have a well-reasoned biblical worldview. We will uphold the biblical and natural definition of marriage and encourage repentance from all sin, including homosexual and transgender related sin

17. Marriage

What Is the Issue?

Given the confusion in society regarding marriage, the Church needs to live out the biblical mandate for marriage as the lifelong heterosexual union of one man and one woman, and model that union to society at large while at the same time ministering to the many people affected by broken marriage covenants both inside and outside the Church.

What Does Scripture Say?

“God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them” (Genesis 1:27).

“For this reason shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh” (Genesis 2:24).

“What God has joined together, let not man put asunder” (Mark 10:9).

Marriage was created for the mutual good of man and woman (Genesis 2:18; 1 Corinthians 7:3-5; Ephesians 5:23-33).

How Do We Understand This?

In the beginning, when God created Adam and Eve he defined their relationship by creating the institution of marriage as a lifelong relationship between one man and one woman. This model of marriage is the ideal cornerstone on which the family and society should rest as it acts as a mediating institution between the individual and government, socializes children, and models the relationship between Christ and his Church. As fallen creatures, however, humankind in many cases has not lived up to God’s plan for marriage.

In modern society marriage has become devalued and redefined. Both divorce and remarriage are common inside and outside the Church. Spouses are abandoned. Many children are born outside of marriage to single parents or suffer through their parents’ divorce. Still others are seeking to change the very definition of marriage to include same-sex couples, polygamous relationships, inter-species relationships, relationships with children, and even relationships with inanimate objects. Some of these alternative models for marriage have been accepted by civil governments and even some Christian denominations and/or local churches.

When God created marriage as an institution he defined its parameters as a lifelong heterosexual union of one man and one woman. No other relational configuration can be a marriage because it does not fit God’s definition. While some individuals, organizations and governments may seek to change the definition of marriage, they cannot do so in any real way. God created marriage, so he retains jurisdiction over its definition. Humans cannot amend marriage any more than they can amend the law of gravity.

While marriage in the Bible is always in the context of male/female marriage, the behaviors underlying all other types of sexual relationships are always clearly condemned as sinful (See Leviticus 20 for example). Polygamy in the Bible consistently leads to family conflict in the case of Jacob, outright

immorality in the case of King Solomon, and is clearly a deviation from the model marriage in Genesis 2. It has been argued by some in recent years that monogamous same sex couples should be able to have their relationships recognized through marriage, however this is not consistent with scripture. Where the Bible addresses homosexual behavior it is always in the negative. Same sex attraction is not a new phenomenon, as homosexuality was well known in ancient cultures. If God desired to recognize homosexual relationships through marriage, one would expect at a minimum some sort of positive treatment of homosexuality and more likely a positive portrayal of a homosexual relationship. Jesus makes no statement on the matter which he surely would have if he wanted to redefine the marriage covenant. The biblical definition of marriage is clear as is its interpretation and understanding throughout Church history.

As for divorce, the Church's ministry in all of this must begin on the preventative side of the issue. One key to a healthy approach or building stable family units is less teaching on the evils of divorce and more preaching on the scriptural mandate for all God's children – and especially husbands and wives – to relate one to another in a Christ-like manner. Pastors and church school teachers need to keep their audiences in mind. Ephesians 5 was primarily written for families inside the Family of God. Jesus' words on divorce in Matthew 19, Mark 10, and Luke 16 – although relevant to the Christian today – were primarily directed at skeptical, hard-hearted scribes and Pharisees who were attempting to ensnare the Lord in ethical dilemmas. The Christian shepherd is called upon to feed, correct, bandage, and to encourage the flock, not to condemn it. Among the root causes of divorce are such things as selfishness, lust, unkindness, thoughtlessness, irresponsibility, ungodly priorities and laziness. The responsible Christian leader would do better to counter these threats than to beat on the dead horse of divorce.

Because the biblical expectation for marriage is a lifelong union, the Bible only addresses the issue of divorce on a limited basis. Matthew 19:9 says, "I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery." Here, the phrase "except for marital unfaithfulness," seems to imply cases where marital unfaithfulness is the basis for divorce. In such a case the "innocent" party is not prohibited from marrying again. Traditionally marital unfaithfulness refers specifically to adultery, but more broadly it can be understood as breaking the marriage covenant and can thus include other elements such as abuse and/or abandonment. In 1 Corinthians 7 Paul tells us, "If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him... But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances." Here is another case where it would appear that remarriage might be permissible. If one takes the phrase, "is not bound," to its fullest possibilities, remarriage in this case may be scripturally justified.

The words of 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 summarize the Christian ideal for husbands and wives who are members of the Family of God. It follows that Christian pastors, teachers, and church leaders are under scriptural mandate to make it known to the Family of God that divorce and remarriage are not viable options to Christian husbands and wives who find themselves in conflict. Beneath this teaching lies the understanding that for couples who are genuinely committed to Jesus Christ, the power for reconciliation is always available. This may mean, at times, temporary separation for the purposes of working towards reconciliation, but even in this situation, parties must remember that they are accountable to their marriage vows.

Having said this, we must also add that there can be no question that divorce is not in God's perfect will for any couple. As such it is a sin, but where there is true repentance there is forgiveness, cleansing and healing. Always with God there is the opportunity for a fresh start.

How Can We Respond (Minister)?

As the Church, our role is to present biblical truth to the world at large as well as to our own congregations. Some practical suggestions for the local church and/or the Church at large could include one or more of the following:

- We must clearly teach what marriage is and what it is not without regard to prevailing cultural whims.
- Teach/preach regularly on marriage and family needs/issues from a biblical base.
- Intentionally incorporate biblical teaching on marriage and family into the total ministry of the church, especially within youth and young adult ministries.

We as the church must also provide a community that encourages married couples in their relationships.

- Create a ministry of older married couples mentoring younger couples as they prepare for marriage or in their early years of marriage.
- Hold an annual marriage/family retreat for married couples.
- Establish a marriage counseling ministry for the church and the larger community.

We must also provide support and compassion for those who have suffered from divorce, be they the husband or wife, their children or their extended family. The pain of divorce impacts multiple relationships, not just the couple divorcing.

- Sponsor a divorce recovery group in the church and open it to the community.
- Provide training for church leaders/teachers in how to minister to broken family members.

18. Material Stewardship

What Is the Issue?

Humankind has become increasingly obsessed with what it possesses materially and the empowerment that it provides over their lives. This has resulted in increasing attitudes of greed and discontentment. It has led to destructive levels of indebtedness and inflation. It has tied a person's worth to his or her material assets and caused humankind to worship money instead of God. It has often undermined the biblical call to generosity and sacrificial giving.

What Does Scripture Say?

"Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it" (Deuteronomy 10:14).

"The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is slave to the lender" (Proverbs 22:7).

"You cannot serve God both God and Mammon" (Matthew 6:24).

"Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these thing" (Matthew 6:31-32).

"Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return" (Luke 6:38.)

"It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

"Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law" (Romans 13:8).

Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed" (2 Corinthians 9:6-8).

"For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs" (1 Timothy 6:7-10).

How Do We Understand This?

Christians are called to live under the Lordship of Christ, which is undermined by the seduction of materialism. To properly live under the Lordship of Christ, the believer must dedicate everything to Him,

including one's body, resources, and lives. Biblical stewardship accepts responsibility to live congruently with the commands of Christ and to conduct one's life based on his values. Christians tithe as a foundation for this Lordship, and giving is never limited by any percentage definition unless it be one hundred percent.

All of one's wealth belongs to the Lord and is to be available for His purpose. As a result believers are to be dependent upon the Lord for all needs. The accumulation of wealth merely to accumulate wealth or to be independent of the Lord is sin.

Christ calls the believer to value persons over possessions, to be intentional, generous and sacrificial in giving, and to live simply so that one's possessions do not possess and so that personal resources are available for the Lord's purposes. This challenges Christians to be careful with debt, lest debt makes one prisoner to another. It also means that to rob another of wealth or possessions, especially to take advantage of one's ignorance or powerlessness, is particularly abhorrent to God.

How Can We Respond (Minister)?

The Church needs to teach and to practice the principles of biblical stewardship: particularly on matters of ownership, wise spending, giving, debt, tithing, generosity, etc. To do so the Church should:

Provide financial counseling and mentors to those caught in financial distress.

Practice budgeting and spending based on obedience to God's vision. Building and facility expenses, especially expansion projects, need to be within reason and be weighed against ministry priorities.

Generously reach out with its resources, individually and collectively, to those individuals on the fringes of society who are without life's basic needs.

Give away more than it retains for its own operational needs. This is not always a matter of dollars. Time, service projects, hands-on personal care can mean as much or more as benevolences.

Provide a direct channel for its members to dispossess their accumulated goods either by sponsoring in-house collection and distribution and/or supporting community agencies who do so.

19. Nationalism and Military Service

What Is the Issue?

Should a believer be involved in military service to his or her country?

What Does Scripture Say?

In the Scriptures there is a body of material which can be taken in differing ways. In the Old Testament we see Abraham going to war in Genesis 14 with his own private army to rescue Lot. As Israel becomes a nation, they are commanded to destroy certain peoples (Deuteronomy 20:16-17). In David's era, it seems there were expected times when kings warred with each other (2 Samuel 11:1). However, at the same time, David urges Israelites to "pray for the peace of Jerusalem" (Psalm 122:6). Israel had various conflicts and at times God was very involved (1 Samuel 15). It must be noted that Israel was a theocracy, and God was the ruler, at least in theory.

In the New Testament, Jesus speaks of peace. It is obvious he speaks of personal peace. However he asks others to be peacemakers (Matthew 5:9). He also seems to condone self-protection (Luke 22:35-38). Paul uses military language when referring to the Christian life (2 Timothy 2:3-4). However the concept of the Kingdom of God is pervasive in the gospels and the rest of the New Testament. Paul gives a description of this present form of the Kingdom in Romans 14:17. It is described with the word "peace." As the Church grew, the idea of believers as non-resistant became pervasive. The ante-Nicene Fathers Origen and Tertullian as well as Justin all spoke of this. There is also evidence that the early Church included Roman soldiers.

In the Bible the following can be said to be true:

Peace is important to God (1 Corinthians 7:15, 1 Peter 3:11).

Believers are to be first and foremost soldiers of Christ (2 Timothy 2:3-4).

One day all the kingdoms of the earth will be under the rule of Christ (Revelation 11:15).

The believer's main job is sharing the gospel (Matthew 28:19-20).

A believer must have faith in what he or she does. For some the statements of Scripture would convict them not to participate in human conflicts (Romans 14:23).

How Do We Understand This?

The issues of violence, military service, militarism and wars of aggression, and imperialism have historically not been dealt with well by the people of God. Evil is real and does exist. There are times for the believer to be involved in military service in defense of one's country. There are realities concerning self-defense and defense of one's country. They are pragmatic and they deal with present world conditions. Often Christian denominations simply assume that young men and women will join the armed services and be involved in warfare. This is often even promoted.

In the 4th century Augustine of Hippo wrote extensively on what has been called the “just war theory.” Others have taken this and have formulated “a preventative war” theory. As the Reformation progressed some wanted to look at the Church earlier than Augustine. The Anabaptists, and later some pietistic movements made non-resistance a test of fellowship. It may be argued that before Augustine, a majority of the Church believed that Christians should not be involved in warfare.

In 1830 John Winebrenner helped begin a solely American religious movement. It was not from Europe, and it severed ties with European-rooted denominations which had come to America. Clearly Winebrenner struggled with what believers in his movement should do on this issue. In 1844 in his doctrinal formulation he states, “She (The Church of God) believes that all civil wars are unholy and sinful, and in which the saints of the Most High ought never to participate.” (An Original History of the Religious Denominations at Present Existing in The United States, [Harrisburg, 1844], p. 181) Winebrenner protested vehemently against the Mexican American War of 1846-1848, calling it a war of imperialism and aggression. Part of his objection was also rooted in the idea that any territory seized might be formed into new slaveholding states.

The Church of God was abolitionist and wanted slavery to end. This non-resistance and desire for justice clashed. By the time of Winebrenner’s death in 1860, the tide had shifted and the younger leaders in the Church felt that while abhorrent, a civil war was the only way to settle the issue. After this time the original statement of Winebrenner disappeared from new formulations and held little sway in the Churches of God.

The question of military service however is still important. There is a difference between nationalism and patriotism. Patriotism is a love for, a pride in and loyalty to one’s country. Nationalism may lead to a blind allegiance to one’s country’s policies and often a support of expansionism and imperialism. It may include oppression of another people group or aggression against another country. Patriotism can be very constructive, but historically nationalism often leads to war, invasion, oppression and even genocide.

The key question is: “Should believers in Christ be involved in sectarian wars?”

How Can We Respond (Minister)?

Many conflicts have admirable goals such as national defense or opposition to repressive and aggressive regimes. Some do not. When a person takes the military oath, they promise to obey orders. This could be problematic for believers. While in the end, this is a personal choice, the idea of the sanctity of life, the Lordship of Christ, and the idea that we are to give life and not take it are all areas to think about in relation to military service.

It seems given scripture and history, in the event of war or a national draft the Church would look at the conflict carefully. The Churches of God holds to a free conscience position on military service which is to say that the decision whether to serve in the armed forces or not is personal and not a matter of Church policy. In the past the Church has supported those who felt they could not participate in a combatant role. This could and has been defined as supporting those choosing to be conscientious objectors. In like manner the Church is also encouraged to pray for and support those who choose to participate. As believers in the case of war, those who object on scriptural grounds have opportunities and

are even duty bound to help the victims of war in non-combatant service. The chaplaincy is another opportunity to aid those involved in war, in a spiritual and non-combatant role.

The Church also has a tremendous opening into the lives of those who return from war. Physical wounds and lasting injuries, psychological effect such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and other results of war call for ministry in a variety of ways. These include employment, counseling, therapy, friendships and a variety of practical helping ministries involving everyday life.

It is important to urge our people not to “go with the flow” of the emotional moment when an act like 9/11 happens. It is important to seek God, and see how we can be peacemakers and pray for guidance in what our individual and national response should be. Hatred and revenge are inappropriate responses for believers.

Finally, while it is the job of the secular government to protect its citizens, how a believer should be involved in what could quickly become evil is a question which requires deep thought and prayer. Believers are called citizens of Heaven (Philippians 3:20). This citizenship should make us think deeply about our place in the conflicts of this world. Whatever a believer decides in relation to military service should come after much prayer, counsel and earnest thought, concerning how best to glorify God.

20. Natural Resources & the Care of God's Creation

What Is the Issue?

The natural world is more and more at risk due to man's poor care of God's creation.

What Does Scripture Say?

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good" (Genesis 1:1, 31a).

"The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" (Genesis 2:7, 15).

"What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas" (Psalm 8:4-8).

"The highest heavens belong to the Lord, but the earth he has given to man" (Psalm 115:16).

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:1-3).

How Do We Understand This?

In the words of King David in Psalm 24, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it." God made it and as the creator everything belongs to him. And yet as the texts above indicate God entrusted the use and care of the earth to humankind. The natural world is nothing short of a sacred trust. In all trust arrangements the trustee (in this case humankind) is accountable to the real owner (God) for the stewardship of the trust (the earth).

Sadly, the human record of earth care shows a definite negative balance, especially since the beginning of the industrial revolution in the late 1700s. Even before that the abuse of the environment was evident. The extinction of species, diminished habitats, fouling of the waters, Chernobyl, light pollution, etc. all put mankind's trust in the red. Good things have happened such as preservation in parks around the world, better agricultural practices, recycling trends, and the like, but more is needed to put the trust back in the black. Of all people, God's people understand this sacred trust and the ultimate accountability factor. So, the Church needs to be in the forefront of environmental conservation and the stewardship of natural resources, especially since Jesus is the creator and sustainer of all.

How Can We Respond (Minister)?

It is important the Church avoid the politicization and polarization the conversation on the environment sometimes engenders. Individuals can and do hold varying views regarding "climate change"

which is a personal prerogative, but of all people the Church needs to serve as caretakers in the garden of the Lord. Corporately and individually she can make a difference by taking a pro-active approach.

- Promote environmental awareness in the teaching/preaching ministry of the church.
- Encourage recycling and set up internal church systems to do so. Almost anything can be recycled, reused or repurposed: Bibles, books, clothing, furniture, literature, toys, etc.
- Discourage or minimize the use of Styrofoam and other products that are not recyclable and end up in a landfill. Instead use biodegradable products (cups, plates, etc.) and/or reusable ones.
- Teach people to make a personal difference by not trashing the environment and by picking up after those who do. Provide waste cans around the church and community for people to use.
- Promote and participate in community and roadside litter and trash pick-up opportunities as individuals and/or a church. Adopt a highway, neighborhood, street, house, etc. and clean it up.
- Turn the church property into a “Garden-of-Eden” to inspire appreciation for flowers and plants.
- If space allows, sponsor church member and/or community gardens on church property. Produce can be used as mission outreach or to benefit members. Include all ages in the project.
- Sponsor and host organizations that promote environmental awareness such as scouting troops.
- Utilize hiking, camping, and retreat events to get all ages out into God’s creation.
- Support as may be appropriate organizations devoted to conservation and environmental issues.

21. Racism

What Is the Issue?

Despite the fact that we live in increasingly diverse societies, racism and xenophobia remain part of human mindsets and behavior. The Church has responsibility to lead by example, unifying people in community that values individual and ethnic uniqueness. We should in no way participate in tribalism over promotion of the kingdom of God.

What Does Scripture Say?

“Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’ So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:26-27).

“The Lord had said to Abram, ‘Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you’” (Genesis 12:1-3).

“As for the foreigner who does not belong to your people Israel but has come from a distant land because of your name— for they will hear of your great name and your mighty hand and your outstretched arm—when they come and pray toward this temple, then hear from heaven, your dwelling place. Do whatever the foreigner asks of you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your own people Israel, and may know that this house I have built bears your Name” (1 Kings 8:41-43).

“I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth” (Isaiah 49:6b).

“No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are” (Acts 15:11).

“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

“After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb’” (Revelation 7:9-10).

How Do We Understand This?

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth and as the pinnacle to his creation – a creation he called “very good” – God created humanity in his image. In the same way that all of creation in its diversity sings of the creativity of our God, so too humanity in its diversity is blessed by God. In his

call to Abraham, God makes it clear that he continues to care for all nations and all peoples and that his plan for salvation will encompass all who believe regardless of their ethnicity. In his Gospel, Luke intentionally traces Jesus' lineage back to Adam to remind us that the Son of God is born not merely of one people group but from the one from whom all nations descend. And in the book of Revelation, the glimpse of Heaven that John is given includes a diverse crowd from every nation, worshipping God in his splendor.

While God called Israel to be his chosen people, gifting them with the law and the prophets, he continually makes it clear in scripture that Israel was blessed so as to be a blessing to the nations. Unfortunately, this was a vocation Israel as a nation rarely fulfilled. God affirms throughout scripture his steadfast love for all peoples, especially for the downtrodden and disenfranchised. The New Testament ethic of the kingdom God overtly call for solidarity. There is therefore no place among the people of God for racism or xenophobia of any kind.

Unfortunately, many, if not most of us, live in societies where individuals are treated differently either because of the color of their skin or their country of origin. While we may in many ways observe and applaud the progress of the western world in the last sixty years and acknowledge that racism is not institutionalized in the way that it once was, we also acknowledge that society has a long way to go. Both the remnants of abolished systems as well as existing racism and xenophobia make it difficult for many to see a clear path forward. We believe that the Church should not only stand apart from racist attitudes but should also lead in matters of racial reconciliation.

How Can We Respond (Minister)?

As the body of Christ, we must begin by acknowledging our complicity in racism either is overt acts or by remaining silent in the face of discrimination. We, the Church, are called to be the light in the same way that Israel was in the ancient world and that begins by modeling for the world a willingness to acknowledge wrongdoing and a pledge to move forward in a way that brings healing and reconciliation. Our teaching should involve both an honest look at our past and the biblical mandates God has given to his people.

We can be intentional about reaching across racial and ethnic lines to engage in joint events whether through specific times of healing prayer or weekly worship services. It often goes a long way to have minority or disenfranchised groups take the lead in hosting and leading such events.

We can and should pray regularly for those who experience discrimination and for those who perpetrate such hatred that their hearts may be softened.

22. Relationships (Social Media)

What is the issue?

Relationships are the cornerstone of human life, shaping our interactions with others and influencing our journey of faith. Today, there are many ways to have relationships with people and interact with technology. Social media, machines, and artificial intelligence have emerged into the conversation and are changing the ways human beings connect. While they are good tools, they also present some obstacles as to how we relate to others. They are a poor substitute for authentic relationships and interactions. The Bible gives us direction for healthy human relationships, and a Christian needs to discern what tools may help facilitate those. For example, the algorithms by which social media operates tend to isolate us, preying upon addictive tendencies and radicalizing divisive views.

What Does Scripture Say?

At the heart of scripture is the command to love one another. Jesus Himself declared “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34-35).

Scripture reminds us of the importance of love and kindness in all our interactions. We are instructed to “be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32).

The Bible warns against the dangers of gossip, slander, and divisive speech. “A perverse person stirs up conflict, and a gossip separates close friends” (Proverbs 16:28).

Additionally, the Bible emphasizes the importance of authenticity and integrity in our relationships. Jesus teaches, “All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one” (Matthew 5:37).

Finally, Scripture encourages us to seek meaningful, edifying connections with others. Hebrews reminds us of the importance of fellowship and encouragement: “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:24-25).

How Do We Understand This?

These principles apply to in-person relationships and our online interactions. Healthy relationships have visible fruit. Love is the greatest of these. The biblical idea of love is most clearly exemplified by Jesus who, “while we were yet sinners [he] died for us” (Romans 5:8).

In the context of social media, where information spreads rapidly and opinions abound, we must be vigilant against the temptation to engage in negative or hurtful behavior. Instead, let us use our words to build up, encourage, and inspire others. This is not the same as agreeing with or affirming what we know leads to sin or hurt in one’s life. As Christians, we should strive to be genuine and transparent in our online interactions, avoiding deception, manipulation, or the pursuit of popularity. As it says in Ephesians 4:15, “Speak the truth in love.”

How Can We Respond (Minister)?

The Church ought to strive to facilitate meaningful relationships centered around Christ. It can use tools such as social media to foster connections across distances, it should never replace the depth and richness of face-to-face relationships within the Christian community.

Whether commenting on a post, sharing content, or engaging in discussions, Christians should always strive to show love, grace, and respect to others, even when we disagree. Love is the foundation of all healthy relationships, characterized by selflessness, kindness, forgiveness, and sacrificial giving.

The Bible provides timeless wisdom and guidance for building healthy relationships that honor God and reflect His love. The Church ought to strive to model love, humility, and grace in our relationships, pointing others to the transformative power of Christ's love. May our relationships be a testimony to the world of God's redemptive work in our lives and his desire for unity and reconciliation among His people.

23. School Choice

What is the issue?

In light of trends within public education systems moving increasingly away from biblical truth, Christians must weigh the responsibility to guard and protect the hearts and minds of their children with the command to let their light shine in the world so that others might see it and praise the Father.

What does Scripture say?

“These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up” (Deuteronomy 6:7-8).

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Proverbs 1:7).

“How much better to get wisdom than gold, to get insight rather than silver!” (Proverbs 16:16).

“In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – His good, pleasing, and perfect will” (Romans 12:2).

“Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

“See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ” (Colossians 2:8).

How Do We Understand This?

Education is vital for all. The process of teaching and learning which leads to true understanding is the pinnacle of discipleship. Wisdom and understanding are considered more valuable than gold or silver (Proverbs 16:16). The Bible places the responsibility to train and educate their children firmly on the parents. The church has always assisted in the process of education, founding knowledge on God himself. The public school system is an option for many parents for the education of their children, but this choice does not negate the responsibility parents have in the Lord. This means parents must be involved or at least knowledgeable of decisions regarding curriculum, request and attend meetings with others who are assisting in educating their children, and spend time reviewing what’s being taught to their children. The

reality is that public schools do not teach biblical principles or use discipleship to Jesus as a worldview. This teaching remains the responsibility of parents within the context of the Church and must include but is not limited to the faithful teaching of God's word.

Understanding one's school choice opens the door for parents to directly homeschool their children, to partner with a private school of their liking, or to opt for a public institution while still recognizing their own role in the training and instruction of their children. Parents who are followers of Jesus must also consider the command to let their light shine before others so that others might praise the Father (Matthew 5:16). This means that children must be given opportunities to interact with others beyond the home and must be encouraged to be bold in their faith. Parents are also primarily the ones responsible, regardless of the school choice they make, for helping their children avoid being conformed to worldly patterns and deceived by worldly philosophies. This responsibility should factor into any choices parents make regarding their children's education.

How Can We Respond (Minister)?

Regions, congregations, and individuals should be encouraged to stress the importance of the responsibility that parents have to oversee and participate in the training and instruction of their children. In addition, churches and their regions are encouraged to provide support and guidance for any group or institution that wants to consider developing a private school or hosting an existing one in their building. This would also include homeschool cooperative programs. All followers of Jesus are urged to participate in public meetings where curriculum for public schools in their region is being discussed, and to respectfully voice concerns related to worldly and deceptive philosophies that are being taught to the children in their communities.

24. Self-Defense

What Is the Issue?

While there are reasons why one might seek to own or use a weapon, followers of Jesus are sensitive to the issue of violence. The Christian faith is based on a God who loves his enemies. Therefore, we must determine when self-defense is morally and biblically acceptable.

What Does Scripture Say?

“Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’ So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:26-27).

“After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, ‘Don’t be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your families, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.’ – From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor. The officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other, and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked” (Nehemiah 4:14,16-18a).

“But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also” (Matthew 5:39).

“When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up his plunder” (Luke 11:21-22).

“But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him” (Luke 12:39-40).

“Then Jesus asked them, ‘When I sent you without purse, bag or sandals, did you lack anything?’ ‘Nothing,’ they answered. He said to them, ‘But now, if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag; and if you don’t have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one. It is written: ‘And he was numbered with the transgressors’; and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment” (Luke 22:35-37).

“Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take

revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge, I will repay,' says the Lord" (Romans 12:17-19).

"When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. 'He himself bore our sins' in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; 'by his wounds you have been healed.' For 'you were like sheep going astray,' but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls" (1 Peter 2:23-25).

How Do We Understand This?

In Luke 22, Jesus uses the fulfillment of prophecy (Isaiah 53:12) to explain to the disciples why they need to be prepared to defend themselves and others. Up to this point, Jesus and his disciples did not face much hostility or the threat of violence, and he commanded them not to take anything along, not even for protection. But as his earthly ministry brings him closer to the cross, Jesus is telling the disciples that they will indeed be met with hostility and violence. Scripture is soon going to be fulfilled, and after that happens, Jesus will no longer be physically with them. The disciples will need to take some steps to meet their needs and protect themselves. In that same passage, Jesus refers to a heavy outer garment, or cloak, that provided protection from the elements. In Jewish culture, the garment is considered to be one of a person's most important possessions. Jesus is instructing his disciples to sell such a valuable item in order to buy a sword. This stresses the importance of guarding one's life. Self-defense is of greater priority than any valuable article of clothing. With his words here, Jesus is implying that self-defense against physical threats is a proper object of concern.

While Jesus is not directly addressing the issue of self-defense with weaponry in the Luke 11 and 12 passages, he references the general assumption that a person would protect his own house and possessions, including with weapons, demonstrating that doing so is permitted. At the same time, Jesus' words show that even the best arsenal cannot guarantee total protection.

Many argue that relying on earthly weapons for protection is a sign of spiritual weakness. This argument is no different from saying that providing for one's own food and water is a sign of spiritual weakness. God does provide, but many times he provides through earthly and practical means. It is possible to seek the Lord for protection while simultaneously using practical means that he provides. The residents of Jerusalem during the rebuilding of the wall understood this when, according to Nehemiah 4, they prayed to God and also set up an armed guard and carried their own weapons all as ways of staying vigilant and protected while doing the work the Lord gave them to do. It is not wrong for Christ-followers to use earthly means, provided they recognize that it is ultimately God who works through them (Proverbs 21:31).

As Christians, vengeance belongs to the Lord (Romans 12:19). Therefore, the right to carry a weapon is for the protection of ourselves, those for whom we are responsible, or the defenseless. Here are many illegitimate uses for weapons including revenge or intimidation.

Ultimately, peace even with those who have previously done evil to us must be the primary goal. Believers trust that God will ultimately right every wrong done to them.

What about the command to “turn the other cheek”? The “slap” that Jesus refers to may be interpreted as a demeaning insult, and not necessarily a physical blow meant to cause harm or injury. With the command to “turn the other cheek,” Jesus is saying that his followers should not attempt to “get even” with those who harm us. Jesus is not necessarily commanding his followers to willingly submit to ongoing violence or the threat thereof though his teaching here suggests that a peaceful response to violence may be more in line with the principles of his kingdom. Ultimately this must be a matter of conscience for the Christian (Romans 14:23).

Above all else, it is important to remember that God is the author of life and that he created mankind in his image and likeness. Since this reality is not altered based on the crimes or actions of any human being, it is important to value even the life of one who may be threatening or committing violence. Even when force is being used in the last line of self-defense, every effort must be made to preserve life.

How Can We Respond (Minister)?

Believers have a responsibility to live their lives in a God-honoring way that honors the laws of the land. However, we must submit all earthly rights to God, understanding that holy scripture may restrict the observance of this right beyond the extent of human laws. The sanctity of human life, the command to leave revenge to God, and the reminder that earthly means and weapons cannot fully guarantee protection are all truths which must be taught and discussed regularly among believers concerned about their rights.

Churches have a responsibility to:

- Minister to those who have been the victims of violence.
- Minister to those who have used violence and are dealing with resulting mental trauma.
- Provide a safe space for all who attend.
- Welcome those with differing views which fall under the prescription of scripture’s teaching.
- Pray to the Holy Spirit for guidance on all matters of conscience

Additionally, churches may consider:

- Writing policies for what to do in the case of an emergency
- Having an expert like the sheriff’s office analyze the security of the facility

Followers of Jesus must live at peace with others “as much as it depends on” them and must hold human life to an even higher standard than earthly governments do. Therefore, utilizing self-defense with any weapons should always be done with the highest value of life in mind. Because there are times in a fallen world where the violence and threats of others make peace impossible and defense necessary, believers are encouraged to seek the Holy Spirit’s leading regarding the necessary and appropriate forms of self-defense in their given circumstance.

25. The Use of Marijuana

What Is the Issue?

The use of marijuana is widespread leading to a documented rise in physical and mental health issues.

What Does Scripture Say?

While the Bible does not explicitly mention marijuana, it does provide principles and guidelines that we can apply to this issue.

Romans 5:1-5 is a great reminder that the Christian is called through and sometimes to suffer for God's glory.

Additionally, we are called to obey the laws of the land in Romans 13:1-7.

Scripture calls us to honor God with our bodies. The apostle Paul writes, "Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

We are warned, "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

How Do We Understand This?

1 Corinthians 6 reminds us that our bodies are sacred and should be treated with respect. The question then becomes: Does the use of marijuana honor God with our bodies? While marijuana may be legal in some places, we must consider its effects on our physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. Marijuana can impair judgment, alter perception, and lead to dependence or addiction. As stewards of our bodies, we must carefully weigh the consequences of our choices, even when those choices are medically advised.

Furthermore, Scripture exhorts us to be sober minded as in 1 Peter 5:8. While this passage specifically addresses spiritual alertness, it underscores the importance of clear thinking and self-control. The use of substances that impair our ability to think clearly can hinder our walk with God and make us vulnerable to temptation.

In regions where marijuana is legal, Christians must still consider the morality of its use. While something may be legal, it does not necessarily mean it is beneficial or honoring to God.

How Can We Respond (Minister)?

The Churches of God rejects the recreational use of marijuana.

We encourage churches to explore a larger conversation about all drugs and substances used as coping mechanisms to navigate the rigors of life. While there are many legitimate medications which are and ought to be used in the healing process, the negative side effects of marijuana almost always outweigh any perceived benefits. Furthermore, a wholistic care for the person recognizes that there are times when underlying hurts may be best addressed by prayer and spiritual healing.

The Churches of God history is one that strongly encourages sober-mindedness. As the Church, we encourage our brothers and sisters to prayerfully consider how their choices align with God's word and to seek wise counsel when facing difficult decisions. The Church ought to minister to those caught up in the snare of addiction, offering resources where able and always strength, support, and love. Let us strive to honor God with our bodies, to be sober-minded, and to walk in obedience to His commands.

26. Wellness and Self-Care

What Is the Issue?

We live in a fast-paced society with demands and high expectations. We live in a society that has largely abandoned the Creator's rhythm of work and Sabbath rest. It has taken its toll on our health, relationships, and spiritual well-being as individuals; not to mention the cost to our society in productivity, economy, and community.

What Does Scripture Say?

"By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made" (Genesis 2:2-3).

"Observe the Sabbath day to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. 'Six days you shall labor and do all your work...' " (Deuteronomy 5:12-13).

"The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, 'Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest'" (Mark 6:30-31).

"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?" (1 Corinthians 3:16).

"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body." (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

How Do We Understand This?

We believe that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit, not simply in the spiritual sense but in the physical, as well. God is the Giver and Sustainer of life and we are called to be good stewards over our physical bodies. In a fallen world there are many afflictions that we must face which undermine our health.

One is diet. God has created our bodies to function with proper nourishment. Our propensity to foods that pleasure us often create unhealthy side-effects in our cholesterol, our blood sugars, our heart and circulatory systems. This leads to excesses and breakdowns that damage our bodies unnecessarily. We believe it is important to eat wisely.

Another is alcohol, tobacco and drugs. The scriptures teach moderation in some cases and abstinence in others, especially with regard to those things which have the potential to impair our judgment, alter our moods, and lead to addictions. In addition, the use of some of these things results in breaking the law. In such cases we have a particular moral duty not to use these substances and to oppose their sale and distribution.

The third is lifestyle. Genesis 1 clearly teaches that unrelenting work is destructive to mind, body and spirit. Sabbath is a command and a life principle of the Word of God that has been long neglected in our culture resulting in damaging stress, broken relationships, and physical harm.

How Can We Respond (Minister)?

We believe that the Church must once again teach the principles of wellness, wholeness, and selfcare taught in the Word. For example, we should teach our people the necessity of Sabbath as an opportunity to rest and worship. With Sabbath is a commitment to abide in Christ for spiritual and emotional healing and restoration. In addition, we must work within society to support Sabbath rest. This may mean choosing not to shop or dine out on Sunday, refraining from Sunday labor, weekly fasting from electronic media, or other means that create a rhythm of rest and worship against the intensity of the week. In no way is this response meant to become a new legalism; however, the discipline of sacrifice may provide opportunity to be restored and hear again from the Lord.

Recent research has affirmed that the human body does not easily process refined sugar, white flour or artificial sweeteners. To limit these in one's diet may provide more energy, better sleep patterns and a healthier life. Again, this is not meant to be observed legalistically, but gratefully embraced as a gift from God.

A congregation could develop a wellness ministry, offering blood pressure checks; teaching CPR and First Aid; providing an AED (automated external defibrillator) in the church building and teaching persons how to use it; teaching healthy eating habits; teaching stress management skills; and providing exercise classes. While these are offered elsewhere in the community without a Christ centered focus, among the Body of Christ they become a reminder that the human body is the temple of God and must be so respected.

We believe the Church should look seriously at itself, at expectations and schedules which cause us to encourage unrelenting activity which undermines the ability of our people to engage in personal Sabbath. Helping persons creating sufficient margin supports an individual's ability to process stress and be better able to face the challenges of daily life.

In addition to spiritual transformation practicing the spiritual disciplines provide opportunity to develop physical and emotional health and well-being. The congregation should be regularly taught and encouraged to practice spiritual disciplines.

27. Women in Ministry

What Is the Issue?

The role of women in ministry is affirmed by some and rejected by others in the Church. So, what is the biblical position as taught by the Churches of God?

What Does Scripture Say?

In the Old Testament women served as leaders and in ministry roles. Some examples include Deborah who served as a prophetess (Judges 4:4-5), and a judge (Judges 5), as well as a military leader. Other women who also served as prophets include Miriam (Exodus 15:20-21), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14-20) and Noadiah (Nehemiah 6:14). In the New Testament women were noted for being prophets as well. The list includes Anna (Luke 2:36-38) the confirming witness to the Messiah, and the four unmarried daughters of Philip (Acts 21:9). Other prominent women in leadership include Lydia (Acts 16) who hosted a Church in her house, Damaris (Acts 17), Priscilla, Dorcas, Julia, Phoebe, Lois and Eunice, among others. In Romans 16 the Apostle Paul includes a number of women in his list of people to be commended as Church leaders.

“So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:26-29).

Several problematic passages must also be considered in light of women being in positions of leadership in the Church.

“As in all the congregations of the Lord’s people, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church” (1 Corinthians 14: 33-35).

“Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money” (1 Timothy 3:1-3).

“A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing — if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety” (1 Timothy 2:11-15).

“An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient” (Titus 1:6).

How Do We Understand This?

If the number of women leaders named in the Bible were only a few, they could be considered exceptions to the practice of women not being in positions of leadership and ministry. However, with the large number listed, it seems clear that women can and should be expected to serve in positions of leadership and ministry.

The number of women who appear in Jesus' ministry is large and important: Mary, Mary and Martha, Mary Magdalene, the woman who anointed Jesus, the woman at the well in Samaria, and the woman caught in adultery, among others. Women were the last people at the cross (Matthew 27:55-56; Mark 15:40-41) and the first at the gravesite (Mark 15:46-47, 16:1-6; Luke 23:27-28, 23:49, 23:55-56, and 24:1-10). The first to whom the risen Lord appeared were women (Mark 16:9; John 20:14-18).

In Galatians 3 the Apostle Paul makes a clear reference to all people being the same in relationship to their standing with the Lord Jesus Christ. In the body of Christ, there is no difference among gender, culture, economy, or geo-political boundaries. This speaks directly to the issue of saving grace, but it bears huge implications for ministry in the Church. This is a refutation to the common prayer of a Jewish man, "I thank you God that I am not a heathen; I thank you God that I am not a slave; and I thank you God that I am not woman."

The passage from 1 Corinthians 14 is one of the most used texts to keep women quiet. It is important to see this text in light of Paul's earlier comment in 1 Corinthians 11: 5-6 which says, "And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head – it is just as though her head were shaved. If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head." It seems acceptable for a woman to pray or prophesy in public based on this text, only to be refuted later in the fourteenth chapter. Since scripture is not contradictory to itself, it must mean that women are given the right of speaking and praying, but regarding idle chatter they (and men) should remain silent during public worship. It would be a misinterpretation to use the text from 1 Corinthians 14 as a general rule requiring women always to be silent.

It is very likely that Paul's admonition arose from the fact that the men and women were seated separately in the early church, as was the custom in Jewish synagogues and which provided the organizational model for the early Church. It would be improper for a woman to call out to her husband as to what the speaker meant during the service. She should remain silent and inquire of her husband while at home.

Both the passages in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 say essentially the same thing. The issue at hand is more about polygamy and fornication versus monogamy than about the gender of the elder. The elder or overseer must be married to only one spouse at a time. Polygamy and fornication were rampant in the Roman society in which the early Church existed. Such immorality was not to be practiced in the Church. The reason the Apostle Paul addresses the issue in a masculine context in these texts is because of the constraints of language and society in that day.

The passage from 1 Timothy 2 is a carryover from both the Jewish understanding of the role of women, i.e., a woman cannot be a priest, which in the Church is refuted by the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:4-5), and the Roman role of women. Generally women in Roman society were not allowed to engage in public debate or speech, nor could they hold public office. Part of the issue in this text is that

the position of superiority and inferiority based on the fall after sin entered into the world. When Jesus comes and gives life to the Church, he breaks the power of the curse and re-establishes the relationship as intended at creation. That is to say male and female believers are equal partners in God's work, just as they were before humankind fell.

Nevertheless, women in the first century were often not educated; therefore, women needed to learn before they could teach (Witherington, "Why Arguments..."). Hence Paul speaks out against presumptuous women who are in no position to teach anyone. The supposition that Paul is prescribing proscription for all women in key leadership roles would violate his own practices, not to mention the early Church's experience in shared ministry (Philippians 4:2-3; Acts 18:24-26).

The Church needs to keep steadily in mind that which determines or should determine its leadership is not gender but rather the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit. The family of faith is not identical with the physical family, and gender should be no determinant to leadership in the Church. Gender, of course, does affect some roles in the Christian family, but that is irrelevant when it comes to the discussion of the leadership structure of the Church. This is why it is not surprising to find in Paul's letters examples of women teachers, evangelists, prophetesses, deacons, and apostles.

Paul is not interested in continuing the existing fallen patriarchal order and calling it good. One of the signs of Paul's views on such matters can be seen in what he says about baptism. It is not a gender specific sign that the Church has for the new covenant (unlike the one for the old covenant), and Paul adds that in Christ there is no male and female, just as there is no Jew or Gentile, slave or free. The implications of this are enormous. The sign of the new covenant signals a change in the nature of the covenant when it comes to the leadership roles which are now fully open to men and women in the Church (Witherington, "Why Arguments...").

The problem in the Church is not strong and gifted women. All good leaders are needed and were it not for capable women, many churches would have closed long ago. Sadly, the limitations and prohibitions for women leaders in the Church often arise from weak men who feel threatened by strong women and who try by various means, even dubious exegesis, to prevent them from exercising their gifts and graces in the Church.

How Can We Respond (Minister)?

In the Churches of God women have been credentialed for ministry since 1858 when Mrs. Martha Jane Beecher was licensed by the West Pennsylvania Eldership (Forney, *History*, p. 400). At about the same time there was also a Miss Johnson credentialed in the Michigan Eldership. Down to the present time many other women have been credentialed for ministry in the Churches of God, General Conference. It is important for the Church to encourage all people, regardless of gender, to pursue the call of God in their life. Certainly women of God today should be permitted and encouraged to serve under God's calling with the Spirit's gifting in the same capacities as Christian women in the first-century Church did.

The following ideas are given as possible starting points to foster and enhance the ministry of women in the Church.

- Teach the congregation what the scriptures say about women in leadership.

- Regularly invite women to speak and preach for the congregation who serve as role models of Christian leadership to all.
- Lift-up biblical/historical examples of women leaders in the preaching/teaching ministry.
- Recognize church leadership, including the women who serve in whatever capacity.
- Include women at every level of congregational leadership: Administrative Council, commissions, committees, etc.
- Encourage all youth and young adults regardless of gender to participate and lead congregational ministries, mission trips, community outreach, Bible School, etc.
- Challenge individual girls and boys one-on-one to consider God's call on their lives.
- Publicly pray for the Lord to raise-up girls and boys, men and women into his work during Sunday worship and weekly prayer services.
- Post pictures around the church facility of prominent male and female Christian leaders (past & present, local & global) to inspire and challenge people to follow their example.

Selected Resources

Adoption

Bernheim, Gilles, Chief Rabbi of France. Translated by Ralph Hancock. "Homosexual Marriage, Parenting, and Adoption." *First Things* no. 231 (March 2013): 41-50. Accessed June 9, 2015. *ATLASerials, Religion Collection, EBSCOhost*.

The Care of Children

National CASA Association: www.casaforchildren.org.

The Church's Ministry to Families and Individuals

Baker Handbook of Single Adult Ministry, Baker, Grand Rapids, Michigan: 1997.
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Civil Disobedience

<http://www.thomasmorestudies.org/quotes/1.html>.

Creation Stewardship

Sandra L. Richter, *Stewards of Eden*, Downers Grove, IVP, 99

End of Life Issues (Including Euthanasia)

<https://christianliferesources.com/2012/05/09/questions-and-answers-on-euthanasia/>

Human Rights

J. Budziszewski, Ed. Jeffery J. Ventrella, *Natural Law for Lawyers*, Nashville: ACW Press, 2006, 38-39.

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War: Four Christian Views. Robert Clouse, ed. Inter Varsity Press, 1991.

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War, Peace, and Christianity: Questions and Answers from a Just-War Perspective. J. Daryl Charles. Inter Varsity Press, 2010.

Natural Resources & the Care of God's Creation

Stott, John. *The Radical Disciple: Some Neglected Aspects of Our Calling*. IVP Books, 2014.

Wellness and Self-Care

Warren, Rick, D. Min., Daniel Amen, M.D. and Mark Hyman, M.D. *The Daniel Plan*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2013.

Women in Ministry

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McKnight, Scot. *The Blue Parakeet: Rethinking How You Read the Bible*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2010.

Witherington, Ben. "Why Arguments Against Women in Ministry Aren't Biblical," June 2, 2015, www.patheos.com/bibleandculture2015/06/02.

Appendix:
Past Churches of God, General Conference
Position Papers and Statements of Resolution

Winebrenner's Twenty-seven Points (First published in An Original History of the Religious Denominations at Present Existing in The United States, Harrisburg, 1844, pp. 179-181)

Teaching & Practices Publications

(Yellow Book - First published c. 1940)
(Green Book - First published 1959)
We Believe: (Blue Book - Approved by 1983/1986 General Conference sessions)
Document on Healing for We Believe consultations of September 1985
(Updated We Believe - Approved by 2013 General Conference session)

General Conference Actions

Adopted at the 42nd session in 1977: Published as *Concerns Confronting the Church*, 1977

Institutional Life of the Church

The Family of God Concept
The Church and the Churches of God
A Beginning in Church Growth
Recruitment for Ministry
The Church and the Church College
The Role of Women in the Church
Reflecting Jesus: Woman's Work?
Responsible Discipleship

Ministry to Families and Persons

Family Life
Divorce, Remarriage, and the Church's Ministry to Divorced Persons
Abortion
Our Responsibility as Christians to Care for Our Bodies
Alcohol, Tobacco, and Drugs
Gambling
Aging
Handling the Dying Process

Ministry to the Larger Community

Christian Citizenship
World Hunger

Adopted at the 43rd session in 1980: Published as *Challenging Today's Dilemmas*, 1982

The Peace of the Church
Concern for Authority
Maturity in Money Matters (Family Financial Planning)
Jesus and Other Single Adults
Ministering to the Charismatic

Checking the Cults
The Use and Abuse of Television (see 1988: Balancing Your Life)
Abstinence – To Be, or Not To Be?
The Church and the Prevention of Drug Abuse
The Case for Marriage
The Church and Homosexuality
The Right to Live-The Right to Die! Who Decides?
The Energy Crisis

Adopted at the 45th session in 1986: Published as Reaching Beyond Ourselves, 1988

Balancing Your Life
Lonely in the Crowd
Single-Minded Ministry
Human Rights
Choices (Concerns Abortion)
Christian Sexual Ethics
Injured Innocence (Concerns Child Abuse)
White Fist, Black Face (Concerns Apartheid)

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