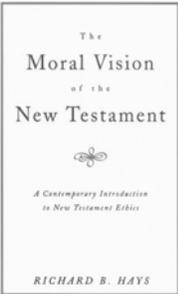


**Scripturally Speaking**  
 Using Scripture for Decision Making and Discernment in the Church

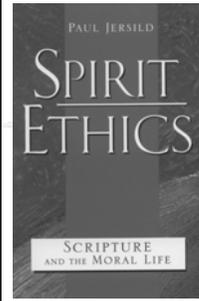
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**Mark Vitalis Hoffman**  
**Theological Ethics**

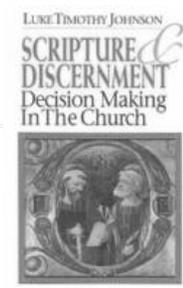
Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg	Mark Vitalis Hoffman mhoffman@lts.edu Valentine 414 717.334.6286 x2414	
<a href="#">Current Courses</a>	<a href="#">Presentations</a>	<a href="#">Previous Courses</a>
<b>Current Courses</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FALL 2005           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ 1:210: Introduction to NT Greek Fall 2005</li> <li>◦ <a href="#">Philippians</a></li> </ul> </li> </ul>		
<b>Presentations and Resources</b>		
<p><i>Please contact me if you need any other previous presentations.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Links to Useful Online Christian Resources</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Suggested Commentaries Listings</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Theological Ethics Presentation</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Baptism in the New Testament Presentation</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Postmodern Evangelism</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Teach to Reach, Reach to Teach (LSS presentations, 2005.02.26)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">YMCS: OT Introduction - Fall 2004</a></li> </ul>		
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Richard B. Hays  
*The Moral Vision of the New Testament:*  
*A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*



Paul Jersild  
*Spirit Ethics: Scripture and the Moral Life*



Luke Timothy Johnson  
*Scripture and Discernment:*  
*Decision Making in the Church*

Why is this issue important?

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Reaching decision in the church should be an articulation of faith.

Luke T. Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment*

As a Christian, reaching decision should be an articulation of faith.

## What are 'safe' topics people can talk about?

- ◆ Weather
- ◆ Sports
- ◆ Family
- ◆ Work
- ◆ Person's health / weight (?)
- ◆ Fashion: clothes, hair, body piercing (?)

What makes these topics 'safe'?

## What are controversial topics?

- Sexual issues: premarital, homosexuality, same-sex marriage
- Abortion
- Religion: prayer, creationism, end time issues, salvation, other religions
- Politics
- Values
- Euthanasia / Assisted suicide
- Financial issues: inequality, taxes
- Justice issues: death penalty, immigration, wars, economic injustice, labor
- Gambling
- Racism
- Gun control

## Controversial topics

Which of these are:

- Political issues?
- Social issues?
- Personal issues?
- Religious issues?

*It is my contention that all such controversial issues have political, social, personal, and (especially to Christians) religious dimensions.*

## What is needed if useful discussions are to occur?

*Some ground rules...*

## What is needed if useful discussions are to occur?

- A commitment to the process of the discussion
- An openness to listen and perhaps have one's mind changed
- Sufficient information about and understanding of the situation
- Some shared basis of agreement upon which to build

## How do we make decisions about controversial issues?

We are likely to argue for a position by appealing to:

- Laws
- Traditions
- Experience
- Reason and Science
- Values (*cultural, family, American, Christian, etc.*)
- Scripture

## How do we use Scripture?

How is the Bible like or unlike the following?

book of proofs	law book
story/novel	book of prophecy
owner's manual	TV Guide
science textbook	newspaper

## How do we use Scripture?

We need to be aware of the following concerns when we appeal to Scripture:

- What texts are used or not? What is our "canon within the canon"?
- How do we deal with texts that are in tension with each other?
- What biases do we bring to the text?
- How do we handle the differences between the Old and New Testaments?

## *"How do you read?"*

Luke 10.25-29

And now a certain lawyer stood up to test Jesus, saying,

"By doing what things will I inherit eternal life?"

And he said to him,

"What is written in the law? How do you read?"

## *"How do you read?"*

Luke 10.25-29

And answering, he said,

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself."

And he said to him,

"You have answered correctly.  
Be doing this, and you will live."

## *"How do you read?"*

Luke 10.25-29

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus,

"And who is my neighbor?"

>> The Parable of the "Good Samaritan"

## How do we make decisions about controversial issues?

We are likely to argue for a position by appealing to:

- Scripture
- Laws
- Traditions
- Experience
- Reason and Science
- Values (*cultural, family, American, Christian, etc.*)

## How do we use Scripture to make decisions?

In the example of discussing the death penalty, Scripture might be cited as:

- Moral law (*Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person's blood be shed.*)
- Principles / ideals (*Love one another*)
- Analogy (*Cain and Abel*)
- Analysis of world / humankind (*Live by sword, die by sword*)
- Understanding of God (*God is love*)

## The Process of Developing a Christian Ethics

- The Descriptive Task  
Reading the texts carefully
- The Synthetic Task  
Placing the texts in canonical context
- *The Communal Task*  
*Discussing the texts within the faith community*
- The Hermeneutical Task  
Relating the texts to our situation
- The Pragmatic Task  
Living the texts

Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*

## TEST CASE: Divorce

### Guiding Questions

- What is the understanding of the roles of husbands and wives portrayed in this passage?
- Is divorce considered to be a sin?
- Should divorce be avoided at all costs?
- Are there legitimate grounds for divorce?
- What are the larger societal ramifications?

## TEST CASE: Divorce

### Deuteronomy 22:28-29

If a man meets a virgin who is not engaged, and seizes her and lies with her, and they are caught in the act, <sup>29</sup> the man who lay with her shall give fifty shekels of silver to the young woman's father, and she shall become his wife. Because he violated her he shall not be permitted to divorce her as long as he lives.

## TEST CASE: Divorce

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## TEST CASE: Divorce

### Deuteronomy 24.1-4

<sup>1</sup> Suppose a man enters into marriage with a woman, but she does not please him because he finds **something objectionable about her**, and so he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house; she then leaves his house <sup>2</sup> and goes off to become another man's wife. <sup>3</sup> Then suppose the second man dislikes her, writes her a bill of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house (or the second man who married her dies); <sup>4</sup> her first husband, who sent her away, is not permitted to take her again to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that would be abhorrent to the LORD, and you shall not bring guilt on the land that the LORD your God is giving you as a possession.

TEST CASE:  
Divorce

Deuteronomy 24.1-4

<sup>1</sup> Suppose a man enters into marriage with a woman, but she does not please him because he finds **something objectionable about her**,

"Objectionable" = a matter of nakedness >>

... **he finds in her indecency in anything...**

TEST CASE:  
Divorce

Malachi 2.13-16

<sup>13</sup> And this you do as well: You cover the Lord's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor at your hand. <sup>14</sup> You ask, "Why does he not?" Because the LORD was a witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. <sup>15</sup> Did not one God make her? Both flesh and spirit are his. And what does the one God desire? Godly offspring. So look to yourselves, and do not let anyone be faithless to the wife of his youth. <sup>16</sup> For I hate divorce, says the LORD, the God of Israel, and covering one's garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So take heed to yourselves and do not be faithless.

TEST CASE:  
Divorce

**Matthew 5:31-32** "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' <sup>32</sup> But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, **except on the ground of unchastity (porneia)**, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

**Mark 10:11-12** He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; <sup>12</sup> and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."

**Luke 16:18** "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and whoever marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery."

TEST CASE:  
Divorce

**Matthew 19.3-11**

TEST CASE:  
Divorce

**1 Corinthians 7.10-17**

<sup>10</sup> To the married *I give this command--not I but the Lord--* that the wife should not separate from her husband <sup>11</sup> (but if she does separate, let her remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife. <sup>12</sup> To the rest I say--*I and not the Lord*--that if any believer has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. <sup>13</sup> And if any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. <sup>14</sup> For the unbelieving husband is made holy through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy through her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.

TEST CASE:  
Divorce

**1 Corinthians 7.10-17**

<sup>15</sup> But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so; in such a case the brother or sister is not bound. **It is to peace that God has called you.** <sup>16</sup> Wife, for all you know, you might save your husband. Husband, for all you know, you might save your wife. <sup>17</sup> However that may be, let each of you lead the life that the Lord has assigned, to which God called you. This is my rule in all the churches.

**TEST CASE:  
Divorce**

How do you agree or disagree with the following statements in light of the Biblical texts studied?

1. God hates divorce but still loves divorced people.
2. Divorce is sometimes the lesser of two evils.
3. Married or divorced, the important thing is to be happy.
4. The only grounds for divorce is adultery.
5. Divorce is
  - a sin
  - divorce is a symptom of our sinful condition
  - divorce can cause sin
  - divorce is simply an unfortunate reality (like a tornado or earthquake) connected with human limitations
6. Divorce is permitted but not encouraged.

**TEST CASE:  
Divorce**

How do you agree or disagree with the following statements in light of the Biblical texts studied?

7. The Church should consider a ritual for the blessing of divorce.

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