



"The will of God prevails. In great contests each party claims to be acting in accordance with the will of God. Both may be, and one must be, wrong. God cannot be for and against the same thing at the same time."

—Abraham Lincoln

25-Mar-05

Judging Life and Death

Many Protestants and Catholics probably recognized the irony in the fact that the Terri Schiavo "right to life" case came to a head during their "Holy Week," in which the faithful contemplate the death and life of [Jesus Christ](#). Schiavo's parents' wishes regarding her fate, pitted against her husband's—and purportedly hers—were argued in courtrooms in Florida, Georgia, and Washington, DC, and in the paneled halls of Congress, which took the unprecedented step of writing a bill for the benefit of one individual. President Bush obliged by signing it into law after midnight, hurriedly flying in from his Texas ranch to seal the deal.

It is no wonder that Terri Schiavo's case has sparked such debate across America, as two opposing values collide within it: the *right to life*, championed in the Declaration of Independence and by a host of devout advocates, and for lack of a better term, the *right to a natural death*, the desire of many not to prolong their lives artificially and pointlessly. Also in

this case, religious beliefs square off against legal ethics, just as it sets medical ethics against parental [love](#) for their child. Surely, this is a case for the [wisdom](#) of Solomon!

We in the church of [God](#) believe that God is preparing us to be kings and priests in His coming Kingdom ([Revelation 5:10](#)), and kings and priests both have the function of judges—one in civil matters and the other in religious matters. If this case were brought before us to judge, how would we rule? What laws or principles would we base our decision upon?

Most of the arguments in the media are emotional. These arguments have their place, but a judge must first consider what is just and true before he has any basis for extending mercy. There must be a standard by which he measures the merits of each side in a dispute, and he rules according to the standard—not according to the fervency of one side's line of reasoning or the background, stature, or acumen of the other party's advocate. God lays out a judge's responsibility in [Deuteronomy 16:18-20](#):

You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates, which the LORD your God gives you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with just judgment. You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality, nor take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. You shall follow what is altogether just. . . . (see also [II Chronicles 19:5-7](#))

The standard a godly judge must follow is, of course, God's law along with the statutes and the judgments. This is how God says it should be done: "In controversy [the priests] shall stand as judges, and judge it according to My judgments. They shall keep My laws and My statutes in all My appointed meetings, and they shall hallow My Sabbaths" ([Ezekiel 44:24](#)). This command, by the way, is given to the Millennial priesthood precisely because the priests of ancient Israel failed to judge as God had directed them. God prophesies, "I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city" ([Isaiah 1:26](#)).

Obviously, in the Schiavo case, the sixth commandment comes into play: "You shall not murder" ([Exodus 20:13](#)). For many, the argument ends right

here, for they prioritize a person's right to life above all others. Certainly, the value of any life is precious, but does it trump all others? The monkey wrench in this case is that, without the measures modern medicine has taken, including the insertion of a feeding tube, Terri Schiavo would have been dead years ago. On top of this, several doctors have examined her and concluded that she is essentially brain-dead—in a vegetative state—and has no chance to live a "normal" life. Though her heart is beating involuntarily, her brain has shut down. What is the godly definition of "life"?

Does the fifth commandment come into play? Some might say it does, using it to justify following her parents' wishes over her husband's. Those on the other side of the case might counter with [Genesis 2:24](#): "Therefore a man [or woman] shall leave his [or her] father and mother and be joined to his wife [or her husband], and they shall be one flesh." Which is the more important principle? Whose wishes should the court grant?

Another scripture that could be brought forward is [Deuteronomy 19:15](#): "... by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established" (see also [Deuteronomy 17:6](#); [Matthew 18:16](#); [II Corinthians 13:1](#); [I Timothy 5:19](#); [Hebrews 10:28](#)). Though Terri Schiavo did not have a "Living Will," a document that sets out a person's wishes should he or she continue to live only on life-support equipment, her husband and several friends have testified that she expressed her desire to them to be allowed to die naturally if she ever landed in such a circumstance. Does the lack of a piece of signed and notarized paper trump the testimony of more than the required "two or three witnesses"?

Some advocates might even bring up Paul's statement in [II Corinthians 5:8](#), "We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord." Nationally syndicated radio talk-show host and columnist Neal Boortz, who is also a lawyer, has advanced such an argument. Is Terri Schiavo better off dead, awaiting the judgment of God? Or is she better off living out her physical life, lying on a hospice-care bed, and needing constant medical attention?

Being a judge is not so easy, is it? Nevertheless, these and other thorny questions are what a just judge must face—not only in the "big" cases, but also in the routine ones. It is easy to jump to a conclusion that "he is wrong"

or "she is right" ([Proverbs 18:13](#), 17), but as the old saw warns, "The devil is in the details." Matters are not always cut-and-dried, which is why God is taking the time to train us in the skill and art of judgment, allowing us to ponder the questions of our time, great and small, and come to wise and godly conclusions without the pressure of having to make the actual decisions.

Take this opportunity to wrap your head around this case and come to a biblically sound conclusion. You may discover a budding Solomonic wisdom in yourself—or an area of understanding that could use some improvement!

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Preparing to Be a Priest](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

If we are not practicing being a priest right now, we will not be prepared for God's Kingdom. During the Millennium, the priest will be required to make a large number of mediating sacrifices on behalf of the people, mediating, reconciling, teaching, judging, and saving the remnant of Israel. The primary function of a priest is to assist people in accessing God- so that there can be unity with God. A priest is a bridge-builder between man and God. The sacrifice that God demands is a total sacrifice of time, energy, and service (in short, ones whole life) to that end. Nothing will prepare us to become a priest more than to commit our entire lives as a total living sacrifice.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Was Jesus Resurrected on Easter Sunday?](#)

by Staff

Most people who claim to be Christians celebrate the resurrection of Jesus

Christ on a Sunday, usually with a dawn service. Is this biblically accurate? Jesus Himself said He would be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. Can that period of time be squeezed into a Friday sunset to Sunday dawn scenario? If we allow Scripture to define its terms and follow the clues, our Savior's resurrection cannot have happened on a Sunday!

If you would like to subscribe to the C.G.G. Weekly newsletter, please visit our [Email Subscriptions page](#).
