

Facing Ethics in Criminal Justice  
Through a Christian Worldview

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A Senior Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for graduation  
in the Honors Program  
Liberty University  
Spring 2011

Acceptance of Senior Honors Thesis

This Senior Honors Thesis is accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from the Honors Program of Liberty University.

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### Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to express the need for young men and women in law enforcement to endure ethical dilemmas through a Christian worldview. Ethical dilemmas and moral struggles in the criminal justice field are described in detail throughout the thesis. In the decision-making process during an ethical dilemma, an officer with a Christian worldview should make better decisions with the added guidance from the Holy Spirit. This thesis delves into the different aspects of ethics including reasons why some police officers make immoral decisions. The ethical issues in criminal justice have been a problem in law enforcement for years and this study identifies the importance of maintaining the honor of the police badge.

The Problems with Ethics in Criminal Justice  
Through a Christian Worldview

### **Introduction**

Law enforcement professionals are handed a great deal of responsibility to represent and uphold the standards of a given police department. Putting on a badge that represents a police department is a privilege but not something that should mentally change police officers to believe that they are above the law. The common views that people tend to have toward police officers are partly because police officers' ethics and morals are being compromised. If one were to utilize an internet search engine and type in "nicknames for police officers," a high percentage of those search results would yield epithets such as "pigs," "filth," "the heat," "po-po," "bacon," etc. Law enforcement is not just another job; it is a profession that demands honor and integrity. Do law enforcement officers deserve the negative connotations that they are dealt? Do the nicknames that are associated with policemen fit who they truly are? In the criminal justice system, law enforcement officers struggle with the ethical issues that come their way. Each day, a new issue emerges into the life of a police officer and it is up to that officer to handle the matter appropriately. In the decision making process during an ethical dilemma, an officer with a Christian worldview should make better decisions with the added guidance from the Holy Spirit.

### **Christian Worldview**

#### **Worldview Defined**

David Dewitt believes that "[w]orldviews are a lot like noses. Everyone has one. Even though [one's] nose is right in front of their face, [he cannot] see it, but [he] can see

everyone else's" (2007, p. 23). The actual definition of a worldview tends to vary, but it is basically a definition that can be broken down by the word itself. Essentially, a worldview is the way in which an individual views and values the world. M.E. Wisniewski defines a worldview as "[a]n internal belief system about the real world—what it is, why it is and how it operates. Within a person's mind [a worldview] defines the limits of what is possible and impossible" (1994, as cited in DeWitt p. 25). A worldview is the true individual. Worldviews are not always based on what a person says or claims to believe. DeWitt (2007) claims that:

[t]he focus of 'worldview' should not be a specific list of beliefs but rather the orientation of the heart...Moreover, unlike a specific list of beliefs, an individual's worldview is not static...[It is] the sum of the feelings, beliefs, memories, knowledge and experiences that are used to interpret events and make decisions. (p. 25)

A police officer's worldview will affect the way he or she handles ethical dilemmas that occur on the job. Worldview is a dynamic concept, and one's worldview entering a department can quickly change due to what he or she may be exposed to. According to Karen Hess and Henry Wroblewski, people are capable of putting on another's worldview to make a certain impression on others, but ethics include one's honor and veracity that are revealed in one's actions when no one else is around (2006, p. 469).

A Christian worldview is maintained by a person who seeks to be Christ-like. Clyde F. Autio believes that "[t]he most simplistic definition for a biblical worldview is to have the mind of Christ" (2005, para. 8). DeWitt claims that a Christian's worldview should be set to the standard of the scriptures (2007, p. 27). Individuals who assert that

they have a Christian worldview should be consistent with what they claim and how they act. DeWitt emphasizes that “the focus of ‘worldview’ should not be a specific list of beliefs but rather the orientation of the heart...and what one actually does or how one behaves” (p. 25).

Many people in the world do not agree with Christianity, nor do they uphold a Christian worldview. B.A. Robinson affirms that about one-third of the world population claim to be Christians, and Christianity is a religion that is decreasing (2009). Of the people who claim Christianity in the U.S., George Barna found that only 9% of born-again Christians have a consistent biblical worldview (2003, as cited in Autio, para. 18). Due to the low acceptance rate of Christianity, it can be a struggle for Christian police officers to enter into a given police department and uphold their testimony.

A Christian worldview does not automatically prevent ethical struggles, but an officer with a Christian worldview should not be as prone to giving in to unethical decisions when facing dilemmas. A key component of a Christian worldview is that it is different than the world’s view. Autio explains the importance of Christians upholding their worldviews and sanctifying themselves from the rest of the world (2005, para. 21). In Romans 12:2 Paul says: “Do not conform any longer 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 (NIV)...” Also, Colossians 2:8 states: “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ (NIV).” These verses from scriptures stress the importance of Christians to stay in God’s will. The verses also warn believers in Christ of the danger of falling into a “deceptive philosophy” that the world

may try to impose on Christians. DeWitt claims that “[t]he more [one’s] commitments and the orientation of [one’s] heart are in line with scripture, the closer [one’s] individual worldview will be in line with God’s heart” (2007, p. 28). At first it can seem simple for Christian police officers to be obedient to the scriptures, but many predicaments and struggles can cause them to stumble. If Christian police officers can uphold their Christian faith in the face ethical dilemmas, then they will have an easier time in their decision-making. As noted, a Christian worldview is easier for believers in Christ to maintain when their actions are in alliance with their claims.

The law enforcement profession comes with circumstances that will challenge a police officer. For instance, a police officer often performs a search warrant on a house, and as he or she is looking through the bedroom of the home, he or she may spot a bundle of cash in one of the drawers. The individual police officer is alone in that particular room and could easily take the money, and no one would ever find out. Police officers with a Christian worldview should already have engrained in them that stealing is wrong and cannot be justified because the money was taken from a drug dealer or a felon. When the predicaments seem impossible, William Tillman claims that “[f]ollowing God’s revelation through His Word [should be the] means of decision making” (1988, pp.80-81).

Cyndi Banks asserts in *The Importance of Ethics in Criminal Justice* that “[m]any people believe that ethical standards and religion are connected and that ethical standards are derived from religious principles and tenets” (2004, p. 10). Taking advantage of one’s given power and authority extends pass the realm of criminal justice. Man in general prefers to be the authority of his own life rather than submitting to higher authorities.

Therefore, when it comes to Christianity, many people do not want to commit to it because it entails submitting to a higher authority: God. Police officers are given a great deal of responsibility to uphold the law, not to act above it. Christians are to submit to the Lord, and He is their ultimate authority. Tillman discusses that “[o]ne of the oldest and most basic approaches to decision making is the one which suggests that we follow the rule” (1988, p. 80). Ecclesiastes 12:13 declares: “Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind (NIV).” Man is indeed a special creation made in God’s image. Even though it is the duty for everyone to keep God’s commandments, man consistently falls short of that standard.

### **Sin’s Effect**

Ethical dilemmas, particularly for law enforcement officers, are nothing new, but not much has changed in handling the dilemmas because of man’s sinful nature. Since the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, men and women do not learn how to sin; They are born with a sinful nature. However, when God created man, He did not create robots. God created man with a free will. In *Reputable Conduct*, John Jones and Daniel Carlson make a great application to man’s free will pertaining to law enforcement: “Underlying [the] system of justice is the idea that people are free moral agents and that if they knowingly commit an unlawful act, they will be punished accordingly” (Jones & Carlson, 2004, p. 22). Man knows what is right and what is wrong. However, it is the decision of a person to choose the right or wrong decision that makes the difference. Jones and Carlson point out that “[g]enerally, officers know what the right thing to do is in most given situations” (p. 109). In the decision-making process of an ethical dilemma,

an officer with a Christian worldview should have an easier time as he will have an added guidance from the Holy Spirit.

### **A Christian's Walk in Law Enforcement**

Throughout life, being a Christian and living out one's faith is difficult and demanding. The world does not always respect the ones who are willing to take a stand and do the right thing. The norm is to conform to the ways of the world. Doing what feels right and looking out for one's own self is what the world encourages. In law enforcement there are times when a police officer will have to choose between the code of ethics and the police subculture ways of handling ethical dilemmas or other given circumstances.

The advantage of being a Christian police officer is that even when one's partner or backup is not present, the Holy Spirit never leaves a believer in Christ. Ethical dilemmas can challenge an individual in every way imaginable. If a Christian police officer goes to the Lord in prayer through a given dilemma, he or she will be better off than the police officer who feels alone and abandoned in their dilemma. Psalms 46:1 states that "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble (NIV)." This passage of scripture encourages believers to never forget about God's omnipotence and how foolish it would be for Christians to rely on themselves through trials.

As stated, a Christian walk is tough and comes with hardships. Although the Lord will never abandon His children, people are not always as faithful. The temptation to compromise one's faith in a police department will definitely be a struggle if a given police officer knows the Lord and is the only Christian within the police department. However, Romans 8:31 is an encouragement to believers in Christ. The passage

challenges: “What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us (NIV)?” It is pertinent for Christian police officers who are entering into the profession to be well grounded in their worldview. The more confidence and certainty Christian police officers have in their worldview, then the more prepared and equipped they will become during the times when their morals and ethics are challenged.

### **Morals and Ethics**

Police officers are consistently having their morals and ethics put to the test. Each day, police officers are encountered by new issues, and it is ultimately up to the individual police officer to handle it. Trooper Michael Murray states that “with the profession of a law enforcement officer, each day brings a new experience and new calls consistently come through the dispatcher. It is truly a profession that is unpredictable” (Trooper M. Murray, personal communication, March 7, 2011). Rookie police officers need to make an adjustment and instill a habit to be sharp and prepared at all times. Not only do police officers have to perform professionally and handle each circumstance appropriately, but the profession requires each scenario to be handled ethically and morally. Therefore, there is a need to define both ethics and morals.

Although ethics and morals are two separate subject matters, they can be used interchangeably. Jones and Carlson exclaim that one’s morals concentrate more on the actual behavior of an individual while ethics studies those morals (2004, p. 18). *Webster’s Pocket Dictionary*, defines ethics as “[t]he system of moral values; the principle of right or good conduct.” Since police officers have the responsibility of enforcing the law, they should look at themselves and be retrospective and always be sure they are abiding by the law. According to Hess and Wroblewski (2006)

law enforcement officers must not only act legally, they must also act ethically...Ethics looks at human conduct in the light of moral principles, that is, set forth by a particular society or culture, laid down by a religious body or doctrine or established by a given subculture. (p. 460)

Ethics itself can be defined in many ways, but generally the same concepts are applied. Debbie Goodman and Ron Grimming use a three part definition in their book as they define ethics as “principles of accepted rules of conduct for a particular individual or group as mandated by law, policy, or procedure” (2007, p. 46). The uniqueness of the law enforcement occupation causes difficulty in abiding completely by these “rules” and “procedures.” Mark Pogrebin writes that no officer is truly capable of policing “by the book,” and that on any given day a police officer could break one of the multiple rules that are all included within the code of ethics for policing (2003, p. 142). The job of a police officer entails a great deal of discretion and decision making that, at times, come with no warning or instruction.

The issue is that the morality in the world is corrupted. Banks believes that “[e]thical considerations are central to decisions involving discretion, force, and due process that require people to make enlightened moral judgments” (2004, p. 4). A higher degree of thinking, judging, and decision-making is expected of law enforcement officers by their supervisors, the police department, and the general public.

### **Balancing the Code of Ethics with the Police Subculture**

Any given department has its own version of the “Code of Ethics.” Along with the department’s code is the police subculture that an officer steps into. The “Code of Ethics” usually includes three main themes: “justice or fairness...The importance of the

law and the police as tools of the Constitution, [and lastly,] police must at all times uphold a standard of behavior consistent with their public position” (Hess & Wroblewski, 2006, p. 469). Departments will have their variations to these codes, but these are the core values for a majority of offices (Hess & Wroblewski, p. 469). The standards of the code of ethics can be difficult to uphold on a consistent basis as an officer will potentially lose the inspiring edge to be the best that he or she can be.

A police officer’s morals and ethics may be affected by the police subculture within the department. Jones and Carlson define a subculture as “a set of norms, communicated informally to all of its members...These norms are said to govern the conduct of those members if they wish to preserve their membership in the group” (2004, p. 68). A balance needs to be established between the code of ethics and the police subculture. Officers entering the police profession want to be sure that they are obeying the code of ethics that they have sworn to obey. However, there is a definite pressure and a natural tendency to desire to fit into a given police agency. Entering into a police agency can be difficult because the subculture’s norms are already set. For instance, a rookie officer needs to adjust his or her mindset that could initially be “solving every case.” A veteran officer who has much experience in the profession knows the reality that every case will not be solved, and may become irritated with the inexperience of rookie police officers. Therefore, rookie police officers have to adjust to the norms of the profession. Police officers must grow accustomed to the police department that they become a part of. Jones and Carlson explain that subcultures are found throughout several occupations. Each subculture has a perceived enemy and the criminal element of the law enforcement occupation is that enemy (pp.66-68).

Being able to balance the strain that the police profession brings is vital. Hess and Wroblewski claim that “[c]onventional wisdom holds that the defining characteristics of the police culture are social isolation and group loyalty, resulting in a code of silence” (2006, p. 471). When a person is part of a given team, whether it is affiliated with sports, academics, fine arts, etc., he or she can appreciate the camaraderie and the solidarity that develops. The same concept can be applied to law enforcement. When an occupation like law enforcement entails putting one’s life at risk for another each day, a loyalty and togetherness will follow. Vernon Fox contends that the loyalty amongst correctional officers and police officers “appears to be stronger and have more meaning...than in most other groups” (1983, p. 162). The police subculture is a tight knit group that forms over time, and it is up to the rookie police officer to enter into the subculture effectively.

It is difficult for rookie police officers to enter into a given department and try to begin in the right direction because they have to be cautious to not cross any boundaries. One police officer was quoted in *Reputable Conduct* for explaining that “the subculture serves [a police officer] well...people do look after each other. There is a recognition coming from one’s peers that is more valued than that coming from administrators” (Jones & Carlson, 2004, p.76). Rookie police officers want to remain ethical and on top of their duties, but at the same time they want to fit into the subculture of the department. The subculture of a police department can be a positive aspect, but the subculture can also affect an individual negatively. Pogrebin explains that detectives have been known to change reports so it is less paperwork and “rookies who opposed the practice and insisted on filing cases as they saw fit were ridiculed and labeled as troublemakers”

(2003, p. 143). Predicaments such as choosing between doing the right thing or pleasing co-workers are inevitable in the career of a law enforcement officer.

Jonathan Anderson (2003, cited in Hess & Wroblewski 2005) concurs in “The Oath” that each officer of a given department will usually have to recite the “Oath of Honor” that reads:

On my honor, I will never betray my badge, my integrity, my character or the public trust. I will always have the courage to hold myself and others accountable for our actions. I will always uphold the Constitution and the community I serve.  
(p. 470)

The “Oath of Honor” discusses the personal duty that police officers are to respect and uphold. The oath does not mention anything about considering the code of silence or covering for fellow officers when they make unethical decisions. The “Oath of Honor” is about the integrity of an individual police officer who should feel privileged to wear the badge of a given police department. The powers that come with a police badge should not be abused. Tim Dees proposes in “First Loyalty” that “many times officers will put loyalty to their colleagues above loyalty to the public or even to the department, often by abiding by the code of silence” (2002, cited in Hess & Wroblewski, 2005, p. 471). Hess and Wroblewski comment on the solidarity of police officers where there is “a togetherness that binds officers to each other rather than to...ethical principles” (2006, p. 473).

The police profession can be difficult if the officers decide not to abide with the police subculture within the police department. As revealed about the camaraderie of a given department, police officers who decide to not be a whole part of the strong bond in a police subculture could likely be shunned and treated poorly.

### **The Code of Silence**

Just as the public has their nicknames for police officers, police officers themselves also have nicknames that can be associated with fellow officers who violate the “code of silence.” Jones and Carlson explain that some of the negative nicknames that police officers associate other officers, who violate the “code of silence,” with are “rat,” “narc,” or “fink” (2004, p.75). Being accepted by one’s subculture can put a strain on a police officer who is trying to remain ethical at the same time. Jones and Carlson believe that “the code [of silence] is an informal one, but one which, nonetheless, is known by all officers...The code is often thought of as having a strong influence on the behavior of officers” (2006, p. 81).

Ethics, in and of itself “is complex and presents serious challenges to those who seek to behave ethically” (Hess & Wroblewski, 2006, p. 469). When confronted with an ethical issue that may jeopardize a fellow officer, other officers may want to do the right thing, but at the same time they desire to uphold their loyalty toward their fellow officers. When an officer decides to do the right thing, the “consequences can range from being ‘put on the grease’ (shunned by colleagues) to threats of personal property harm being made” (Jones & Carlson 2004, p. 73).

### **Ethical Dilemmas**

#### **Choosing the Code of Silence**

Progrebin tells of the account of three officers who arrived at a scene, made a mistake, and let their solidarity overcome their morals and ethical values. The officers received a call from the dispatcher who reported a burglary in progress. As the three officers arrived on the scene, they saw some young boys stripping parts from a stolen car.

One boy ran off and climbed up a rain spout and one of the officers decided to open fire on him. The boy who ran off made his way onto the roof of the building, and moved out of the vision of the officer who fired his gun. Two of the officers were on the other side of the building when their partner shot at the boy. When the two officers heard the gun shots go off they quickly responded to accompany their partner. As the two officers were responding, one of the officers kicked open a gate that struck the other officer in the head. The three initial police officers at the scene gathered together to discuss the events that took place. To their knowledge a boy could have been suffering from a gunshot wound, and he could have been lying helplessly on the roof (Progrebin, 2003, pp. 147-148).

A sergeant arrived on the scene, and the three officers decided to use the officer's incident of being hit in the head with the iron gate as their excuse to have fired upon the boy who escaped up the rain spout. They claimed that the officer got hit by something in the head and yelled loudly, "I'm hit, I'm hit." The three officers told the sergeant that when the one officer heard his fellow officer shout that he was hit, he fired upon the boy who attempted to escape. The three officers stuck to their story and got away with their sub-par police work with a lousy reprimand. It was reported that the boy who was shot at was not found and so it is assumed that he was not hit with any bullets (Progrebin, 2003, pp. 147-148).

The account of the two police officers covering for their fellow police officer shows the loyalty some officers have for one another. The three police officers from the previous account chose to neglect their code of ethics. The officers decided to honor their subculture and the code of silence. Hess and Wroblewski explain that "[e]thical behavior within a law enforcement agency is ultimately the responsibility of each individual

officer within that agency” (2006, p.482). The account of the three officers demonstrates a situation where the police officers gathered to discuss a report before the sergeant arrived on the scene (Progrebin, 2003, pp. 147-148). The three police officers each had a choice to take a stand and tell the truth or conform to his fellow officers. Progrebin concludes that “the officers participate in the construction of a cover story to protect their colleague against disciplinary action and justify it on the basis of self-defense and loyalty” (p. 147).

### **Choosing the Code of Ethics**

As the previous account portrays officers being unethical and getting away with it, being ethical in a situation may get an individual police officer into trouble within the police subculture. Jones and Carlson affirm that “[s]ometimes even choosing to do what [is considered] to be the right thing does not necessarily mean that [one will] be completely at peace with [one’s] decisions” (2004, p. 120). There are times when an officer will face a dilemma and the right decision is not clear. Sometimes the dilemma can have a negative outcome no matter which choice a police officer makes.

Jones and Carlson give an account in *Reputable Conduct* about a female correctional officer who worked the night shift and continued to find a few of her fellow officers asleep on the job. She felt at risk when the other guards fell asleep during their shift, and the text mentions that she approached the guards and asked them to stay awake for her safety and theirs. The female officer also warned them that if they continued to sleep on the job, she would have no other alternative then to report them to the higher authorities. Another shift began, and the female officer found the guards asleep once again. The female officer decided to report the guards to her supervisor. Jones and

Carlson explain that “[t]he consequences for her were severe” (2004, p. 74). The text mentions that the guards harassed the female officer severely. From threatening phone calls to damaging the female officers car, the guards acted out their anger towards her (Jones & Carlson, p. 74). This particular female officer was in a predicament. She could either live up to the code of ethics (in which case she did), or choose the path of the code of silence. Goodman and Grimming argue that, “Ethics is a choice. It is not a fancy concept; it is a choice” (2007, p. 42). The female officer could have chosen to let the guards sleep on the job, but that choice could have led to a dangerous occurrence at the correctional facility. For instance, a prisoner could have escaped successfully, and then it would have put all of the guards at risk. The choice that police officers make in ethical dilemmas can result negatively no matter the decision they make.

As the two previous accounts of real life situations show, a police officer’s worldview is absolutely pertinent when dealing with ethical dilemmas. Times will occur where other officers are counting on an individual police officer to be dishonest and loyal to their fellow officers instead of taking a stand. However, taking a stand can also produce negative consequences from the police subculture. It is the difficult dilemmas where the need for the Lord’s guidance is invaluable.

### **Approaching Ethical Dilemmas**

What makes ethical dilemmas so difficult is the spontaneous manner that they can come about. Tillman points out that for law enforcement officers, “[d]ecisions are made in an impromptu manner...” (1998, p. 85). There are many scenarios and exercises for police officers to prepare themselves for any ethical dilemmas that will approach them in their line of duty. Just as football teams spend hours and days in studying film on their

opponent, running through drills at practice sessions, and conducting meetings on things that the team and individual players need to be working on, law enforcement officers should prepare in a similar fashion. Football teams can spend hour after hour practicing and planning, but all of it can go to waste if they do not go out on game day and execute on the playing field. The same concept can be applied in the criminal justice realm.

Ethical scenarios and moral dilemmas can come unexpectedly. There are several dilemma exercises and mindset practices that can help police officers prepare ahead of time for a given ethical dilemma.

### **The Bell, the Book, and the Candle**

In *Reputable Conduct*, the authors describe “the bell, the book, and the candle” (Jones & Carlson, 2004, p. 128). These three tools are designed to remind police officers who are facing an ethical dilemma that what they are proposing to do is not morally acceptable. “The bell” is like one’s conscience that should sound when he is on the verge of making a choice (Jones & Carlson, p. 128). “The bell” should indicate a warning that the decision being made potentially comes with severe consequences and careful consideration is necessary before making one’s final decision. “The book” refers to the standards and laws that one has been previously taught (Jones & Carlson, p. 129). Police academies drill their recruits over the laws and regulations and each individual officer should know the standards set before them by the department. “The book” should be utilized as a reference to go back over in a police officer’s mind to be sure that the choice he or she makes in their dilemma does not break the code of ethics, or “the book.” The third tool that Jones and Carlson utilize is “the candle” which symbolizes the decision that might be made through the eyes of the public (Jones & Carlson, p. 129). In other

words, before making a decision about an ethical dilemma it is wise for an officer to take a step back and think about how the choice would look if the public were advised about it. The bell, the book, and the candle can be helpful to law enforcement officers if they utilize them.

### **The Video Camera**

Along with the three tools that Jones and Carlson discuss, they also point out “the imaginary video camera” method that is an extension of “the candle” (2004, pp. 129-130). “The video camera” tool is a method of thinking about one’s actions from the perspective of a camera constantly following and recording of a police officer’s actions. No one would like to do something unethical and then find that the department has his or her actions on tape and be called in to watch the video play in front of the Captain. With the technology advancements of today, police departments are advancing their equipment to help keep officers accountable by having various cameras throughout the department and in the squad cars. Jones and Carlson observe that the “imaginary video camera” is a tool “in which we ask ourselves whether our actions can be justified in the light of day” (p. 130).

As a believer in Christ, Christians should have the faith in an omniscient God who is always with His believers. To a Christian, the “imaginary video camera” should not be imaginary at all. The Holy Spirit is always with believers to help guide their path and steer them in the right direction. A police officer who is a believer in Christ and lives his life accordingly should know that he is never alone and will always be accountable to God. Goodman and Grimming support that day in and day out, law enforcement officers “must exercise power, control, and discipline, both on and off duty” (2007, p. 41). The

Christian walk is not something that is turned on and off at different periods of time. A believer who is stepping into the criminal justice field should already have the discipline and integrity when he or she is on and off duty because it should already be engrained in them throughout their daily walk with Christ. However, Christians definitely stumble in their walk and should be just as prepared, if not more than non-believers for ethical dilemmas. I Peter 5:8 states; “Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour (NIV).” Either way the approach of ethical dilemmas is viewed, it comes back to the individual and how he or she handles ethical dilemmas and aligns up his or her morals with his or her life and career path.

### **The Slippery Slope**

In a profession that involves a great amount of discretion, law enforcement also has the potential for slippery slopes. Goodman and Grimming define the slippery slope theory as “behaviors [that] may quickly become increasingly worse, depending on the extent to which the participants are involved” (2007, p. 45). An officer can get used to being deceitful and allow it to generate into progressive lies. Hess and Wroblewski claim that “[p]erhaps the most important factor in police officers becoming corrupt is the extraordinary amount of discretion they have” (2006, p. 479). Being deceitful needs to be controlled and an officer cannot allow the act of lying, when necessary, to become a calloused act. Commissioner Edward Davis of the Boston Police comments on the toleration of lying in his police department; “Any officer caught in a lie, deserves no future [in policing]...in every case [a] lie has the power to undermine the credibility of the entire department – not to mention strip the average citizen of his or her freedom

(2009, para. 1 & 3). Police officers should know the standard that they are expected to uphold from the moment they enter the police academy. Davis adds in his article that “[p]olice officers must pass a physical agility test to get on the force. To stay on, they also must be strong enough to carry the truth” (para. 9).

The concept of the slippery slope is a good concept for officers to remember. Police officers’ common sense should also be utilized. Goodman and Grimming talk about the status, time, and place being three areas that should without a doubt be considered when facing a ‘slippery slope’ scenario (2007, p. 46). It is difficult because young officers are all of a sudden handed power that gives them the right to control others, carry weapons, go faster than the speed limit, ect. The slippery slope can start with something seemingly miniscule like free coffee or half price on lunch and then lead to major crimes like stealing money seized from a drug bust. Accepting gratuities can be fine for a police officer if he or she handles them appropriately, but gratuities also “may be the first small step on the road to more unethical behaviors and eventually to corruption” (Hess & Wroblewski, 2006, p. 480). Unfortunately, some police officers are not always honest and are capable of learning ways around the system.

However, Christian police officers who maintain a Christian worldview will understand the concept of the slippery slope better because it is similar to falling into sin and becoming backslidden in one’s faith. When believers in Christ fall into sin on a consistent basis, they become more calloused to that sin. Similarly, a police officer may lie to get out of a small predicament, but that lie could one day lead to unethical behavior on a larger scale.

**Gray Areas**

One thing that can be very difficult for law enforcement officers is defining exactly where the ethical line is. Does accepting a free coffee make an officer unethical? Or, does telling the suspect that the department has a witness who claims that they saw the suspect commit the crime when there really is no suspect to get a confession make him unethical? Police officers will quickly realize that when dealing with ethics in criminal justice, there can be several gray areas that they will run into. In *Police Operations: Theory and Practice*, Hess and Wroblewski discuss the difference between absolute issues and relative issues. “An absolute issue is one with only two sides... ‘black’ and ‘white.’ A relative issue is one with a multitude of sides, that is, varying shades of ‘grey’ between the two absolute positions. Ethical issues are usually relative” (2006, p. 469). Depending on the officer, some circumstances may appear to be cut and dry while the same circumstance could be a relative, gray issue to another officer. Hess and Wroblewski accurately claim that when the element of power is present, then there is a high possibility that exists to take advantage of that power (p. 478).

A Christian police officer should have an additional filter when dealing with a potential ethical dilemma that appears to be a grey area. That filter is deciding if the grey area is a sin. The sin factor should make any given grey area appear more cut and dry.

**Discretion**

Due to the fact that the criminal justice system is not always clear-cut on every scenario, but deals with a lot of grey areas, ethical dilemmas are more difficult. Also, there is more pressure on the individual officers to be sure that they are abiding to the commands and standards set before them. The Ten Commandments are very clear and

straightforward. However, there are certainly going to be times in the career of a law enforcement officer where he is going to have to be deceitful and lie for the greater good. Progrebin asserts that the recruits in the police academy are taught to be deceitful in some scenarios, but in other cases the recruits are to be honest. He further explains that “officers are told it is ‘good police work,’ and encouraged to lie, to substitute guile for force, in situations of crisis intervention, investigation and interrogation...” (2003, p. 143). Basically, when an officer is interacting with the public, it is accepted by the department to use deceit when necessary.

Discretion of the individual law enforcement officer is vital in scenarios when deceit is necessary and times when it is not acceptable, excusable, or justifiable. The encouragement to lie in given situations can be problematic. Police departments, in general, place great value on the truth and do not want one of their officers to compromise their badge. When it comes to court, there is absolutely no justification or excuse for fabricating the truth. A police officer’s word is to be impeccable and reliable because he or she is often required to testify on a given case in court. The past record of a police officer is always needed to be sure that his or her word can be taken with confidence. According to Detective John Paprcka of the Metropolitan Police Department, a “*Giglio* form” is required to be on file for a prosecutor. The form essentially gives credibility to the officer that will be appearing in court. On the “*Giglio* form,” the officer must check off “yes or no” on questions that refer to a record of any illegal actions, any past of lying as an officer, etc (Detective J. Paprcka, personal communication, December 6, 2009). If an officer has to go into court to testify, his chief will want him to be a reliable source of information and not a “*Brady* cop.” Lewis Kamb and Eric Nalder argue

that since the *Brady v. Maryland* case in 1963, “officers who lie are known as *Brady* cops” (2009, para. 8). In an article entitled “Police Officer Truthfulness and the Brady Decision,” Jeff Noble (2003) suggests:

Brady stands for the proposition that evidence that may be exculpatory in nature must be given to the defense. In a case where an officer will be testifying as a witness to an event, the officer’s credibility is a material issue and his lack of credibility is clearly potentially exculpatory evidence and therefore sustained findings of untruthfulness must be revealed. (para. 26)

In an article published in the *Association for Psychological Science*, the author declares that people have the tendency to remember the bad things that occur in life easier than recalling the good things (“Study suggests we remember”, 2007, para. 1). Police officers need to be conscious of their actions. Christian police officers should always be aware that their testimony is being observed by others. A police officer can be a very credible source throughout ten years of his service, but on one occasion he is found to be dishonest and defense attorneys can use that against his testimony.

### **The Individual is Ultimately Responsible**

God did not create man to be robots, yet He created man with a free will. Man is capable of making his own choices. Jones and Carlson discuss in *Reputable Conduct* the viewpoints of libertarians and the deterministic viewpoint. Determinism asserts that man is not his own creator and cannot control himself, therefore he should not be the one to blame for how he turns out or the choices he makes (Jones & Carlson, 2004, p. 23). The deterministic view is one that many people side with because it takes away their responsibility and accountability. Determinism allows people to take the accountabilities

of their own actions and direct them away from themselves. Man does know right from wrong, but wants to do whatever he feels like doing without having to answer to a higher authority. Man tries to justify his actions and use the excuse that an individual acts immoral or unethical because he is obliged to the positive outcomes of his decisions.

### **Justifications and Excuses**

There are times when higher authorities will approach police officers about dishonest or unethical behavior, and there are justifications with which police officers may respond. Such grounds that officers may utilize for unethical behavior may include: “The money is there – if I don’t take it someone else will,” or “I’m only taking what’s rightfully mine; if I got a decent wage, I wouldn’t have to get it on my own,” or “I put my life on the line everyday – I deserve it” (Hess & Wroblewski, 2006, p. 478). If police officers go throughout their profession with the mindset of being entitled to gratuities, they will not be successful as ethical police officers. In “How Cops Go Wrong,” Chris Masters claims that “[p]olice have been known to look at one another after an arrest of a dealer and mutter, “Why not take the loot; if we don’t the lawyers will get it” (1995). Attitudes of entitlement should not be accepted in law enforcement, and police officers should be ashamed if they use such excuses for unethical behavior. Mindsets and initiatives of Christian police officers are needed to stress the importance of earning their living honestly and not through cutting corners or being dishonest.

As cited, man is a fallen creature and makes mistakes, but when referring to the honor and duty a police officer should uphold, there is no room for excusing and justifying misconduct. Those who are responsible for enforcing the law are not above the law but should set the example for other members of society to view and apply to their

lives. Goodman and Grimming suggest that criminal justice professionals are placed in a “fishbowl for all to see. People are watching” (2007, p. 41). When a police officer faces an ethical dilemma there are many questions that should be asked, but ultimately, “[t]here is no right way to do the wrong thing” (Hess & Wroblewski, 2006, p. 481). Hess and Wroblewski discuss that, “Police officers have awesome powers over other people’s lives. They must act legally and ethically to be true professionals and to be true to themselves as individuals” (p. 481).

### **Mindset of the Police Occupation**

Although ethical issues have been an on-going problem in the criminal justice system, the attitudes of police officers have changed. In today’s economy, if an individual looks for a job and the police route is the best option at the time, then he or she will pursue the job. Sgt. Ronald Wyatt of the Washington D.C. Metropolitan Police Department believes that the new generation of officers has a different mindset than those officers in the past. Wyatt explained that “a good amount of the up and coming officers seek a law enforcement position because of the financial benefits or because it is a job opening that is available for them at the specific time in their life” (personal communication, December 6, 2009). He went on to discuss that when he was growing up, becoming a police officer was all that he really wanted to pursue. It was a “calling” or profession and not just a “job.” Wyatt grew up in a family of officers and in his career pursuit; he did not see himself doing anything else that did not involve law enforcement (personal communication, December 6, 2009). Wyatt’s point is that a person who enters law enforcement with the mentality that it is “just a job” will not succeed and will not do well when it comes to the many ethical dilemmas that comes with policing. The mindset

of “live to work” instead of “work to live” will truly help police officers throughout their careers. Not to say that all police officers are not passionate about their jobs, but there definitely has been a decline in the attitude toward doing the right thing over the easy thing and wearing a badge proudly instead of wearing it because it is just another part of the police uniform.

Christian men and women who are seeking the will of God for their lives and are motivated to do their best to please Him are needed in the criminal justice system.

Goodman and Grimming describe the criminal justice profession to be “linked to a castle: prestigious, prominent and deserving respect. It is critical that the inhabitants of the castle...commit themselves to upholding and enforcing the law and conducting themselves in accordance with appropriate standards of behavior” (2007, p.40). The public does not always view the police profession as “prestigious” or “prominent” and the finger can be pointed at the police officers themselves for being at fault.

### **Conclusion**

The ethical issues in criminal justice are identifiable, disappointing, and understandable (to an extent). Individuals who are pursuing a career in criminal justice need to come to the realization that it is a profession like no other. Having good judgment and using proper discretion is absolutely vital. The criminal justice system needs men and women with the passion and drive to uphold strong morals and remain ethical in their decisions. Individuals are needed who are willing to value their badge more than what the police subculture may think. Lastly, the criminal justice system is in dire need of young Christian men and women who are willing to uphold their beliefs and not compromise their testimonies when the countless dilemmas and struggles approach them.

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