

lower. Such a classification may be based on the intrinsic value of each category of obligation.

Thus confession of the one true and living God is more valuable than human life, and human life is more valuable than material possessions.

Revelation 12:10-11 tells us: "Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: 'Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.'"

And in Matthew 6:25 we read, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?"

The obligation to confess the one true and living God takes precedence over the obligation to preserve human life.

The obligation to preserve human life (whether the life of another or one's own life) takes precedence over the obligation to preserve one's possessions.

Incidentally, the obligation to preserve the life of another does not take precedence over the obligation to preserve one's own life. Human beings have a right to give their life to preserve the life of another, but not an obligation. Giving up one's life to preserve the life of another is an act of sacrifice, a meritorious act that goes beyond obligation, a voluntary act that may at times be an expression of friendship or love. It is also a heroic act! Such heroism may arise from native instinct, or from trained response, or from a process of reasoning, or from a sense of duty, or from desire for glory, or from love.

Romans 5:7-8 tells us: "Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

J. Descriptive and Prescriptive Ethics

A basic distinction in ethics is that between the realm of fact and the realm of obligation -- i.e., between what is and what ought to be. The bare fact that a certain state of affairs exists establishes no presumption in favor of its necessity or desirability or continuance.

Description tells us what is. Prescription tells us what ought to be.

Some ethical views confuse description with prescription, as though the status quo were the best possible state of affairs attainable at a given time in history.