



Jack Bauer MEDICINE?

The television series *24* is set in the fictional US government Counter Terrorist Unit (CTU) and each season depicts a 24 hour period in the life of Special Agent Jack Bauer. Although the series has been hugely successful, *24* has repeatedly aroused media attention for its dubious take on ethics.

Writing in the online journal *In these times*, Slavoj Žižek points out that CTU agents are frequently seen taking the law into their own hands to obtain vital bits of information, in a race against time to stop terrorist activity. As you watch, it's easy to believe that acting outside normal ethical frameworks might sometimes be genuinely necessary. Limited time and the complexity of the situations apparently don't allow for the luxury of reflection, resulting in a separate 'ethics of urgency'.¹

The truth is of course somewhat different, and applies in the time-poor world of medical practice as much as anywhere else. Urgency does not give Christian doctors *carte blanche* to act as they see fit and shelve ethical reflection for a later date. Jesus' observation that those who love him obey his commands was not situation dependent.² Time may well be limited, but it is rarely non-existent.

Three practical factors often prevent us from thinking through the challenges of medical ethics. Firstly, juniors frequently rotate jobs and consequently often face unfamiliar scenarios; secondly, the more senior among us can increasingly operate in auto-pilot; and thirdly, there is the basic reality of sin in our lives. Too often we resolve to think about an ethical issue, but months later still haven't taken action to address our uncertainty.

Proverbs 14:8 reminds us 'the wisdom of the prudent is to give

thought to their ways'. Reflecting on complex cases is encouraged in medical training, but thinking through problems *biblically* seems a rarer exercise. We are also meant to encourage each other to live gospel centred lives.³ Therefore, whatever else we do, when we meet together we could try to thrash out biblical answers to these kinds of issues.

The option of pretending it doesn't matter isn't available to us: ignoring the Bible's teaching dishonours God, and there is a danger that failing to act ethically corrupts us.⁴ The words of Jeremiah 2:5 are striking: 'They followed worthless idols and became worthless themselves'. If we allow our values to be driven by the world, we become like the world.

Above all though, staying soaked in Scripture will make us wise in the many and varied situations we face in life. Of course there will often be no simple proof text, not to mention times when Christians disagree, but these are not reasons to abandon the endeavour.

For the record, I am a big fan of *24*. In fact, I wouldn't mind being equipped with many of Jack Bauer's traits. But when it comes to the ethics, I think I'll pass.

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references

1. www.inthesetimes.com/article/2481
2. John 14:15, 21
3. Hebrews 3:13
4. 2 Timothy 2:16, 1 Timothy 6:9, Romans 6:16