Who owns your data?

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Who owns our data? Who wants our data? And How do we secure our data from those who would seek to do us harm?

Within the cyber-ethics debate there lies a key topic DATA. Data: Information-collection, sharing and distribution. This "new data challenge" is in cyberspace without sovereign borders, without guidelines, without governance. Yet few have taken on the ethics of the information age despite the fact the topic affects every human being on the planet.

Most of these ethical discussions demonstrate the lack of agreement on what should be the foundation for governing each of these large ethical questions. When there is no universal acceptance and adherence to absolute truth - the basis of lasting universally accepted governance there is no framework for ethics. And without ethics there are no road signs or laws by which we govern ourselves and we fall into societal chaos.

What has history shown? Whether Roman law, Mosaic law, Judeo-Christian law or other forms of governance structure any society with civil order pivots on adherence to, whether by force or freely accepting, the law of the land.

Today, in the realm of cyberspace there is no acceptable agreed upon governance. And, even if there was one put into place by an agreed upon political entity, it would be refuted or disobeyed by some unless there is agreement on absolute truth.

Who owns, wants and controls our data and the process in which it is protected, managed and distributed is vital for Christians much like who owns the message is for secular media. We hold a tremendous asset as stewards – our data. What is the answer for Christians and those of us who know that our very liberties are threatened as our identities are being stolen, our national security secrets being held hostage, or our total personal profiles being made public without our permission these days? Is the data age and misuse affecting our very civilization and our spiritual multiplication? It is tempting to remove this data ethics discussion away from Christian discourse, yet we do that to our own peril.

For the Christian all ethical discourse rests upon absolute truth found in the Holy Bible.

Civil law and spiritual law must go hand in hand. It is the basis of continuity of governance, and the basis of ethics and has stood the test of time. Yet, it is often rejected, despised, and shredded for personal or collective gain. All throughout history when Christians have modeled biblical truth they have led the discussion. But when Christians disobey biblical truth they have their very own freedoms jeopardized.

Again to stand on the right side of the information age battle, we do not have to be technical experts we need to be biblical witnesses of truth and apply those truths to the world in which we are placed. In this case it is a powerfully vast and complex information cauldron. It is a time for Christians to lead once again and to know what the biblical principles are that apply and hold Christians to those standards as a means of getting the Gospel message out. There is a pathway worth following that will not lead you astray while all others are vying for your information, your Gospel, and your very life. We will be measured as Christians on how we hold to our own agreed upon truth. If we fail in this, we will lose the greater message, the viability and authenticity of the Gospel being brought to bear in our time.

What are the Christian ethical principles and process related to data use and misuse? In many ways they mirror the ones for good financial stewardship.

1. Data is an asset "ultimately owned" by God not by any one person, organization, church, since He owns everything

2. Data is a blessing in that it offers a vehicle or means to communicating with other Christians and to those without Christ to present the Gospel

3. Data may be a trusted resource of information collection dependent upon how it is obtained and used

4. Data may have little, no, or abundant value depending upon who and what it is used for

5. Data collecting, management and distribution requires biblical stewardship just like

money – What are the principles that apply? What are the scriptures?

6. Data is to be honored much like a person's identity or other assets to be protected and respected

7. Data privacy and use violations are a mark of spiritual, ethical and moral disobedience

8. Data management is critical for Christian organizations

9. Data sharing needs to be done with the utmost of care, honoring prior commitments and agreements

10. Data gets old quickly and must be kept current or risk of offending and harassing

11. Data can be used for good or bad

12. Data procurement, distribution without clear use and ethical guidelines will be problematic

What do these principles mean for the Christian Emergency Network? Who owns the data?

CEN has a clear policy for data gathering, management and distribution throughout the national, state, chapter and church network. The CEN data policies are online and strictly adhered to. Data is not to be shared without the expressed permission of the network that has management responsibility for the data in question.

CEN encourages all Christian individuals, churches, and organizations networked in any way with the CEN to adopt a clear policy of data ethics according to biblical standard, to communicate that policy to its constituents, and to review adherence to the policy on a routine basis.

As Scripture reminds us in I Timothy 6:17-18: " Tell those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money (data), which will soon be gone. But their trust should be in the living God, who richly gives all we need for our enjoyment. Tell them to use their money (data) to do good."