A Useful Check List

Although doing ethics, including doing Christian ethics, does not result in an automatic answer, there is a clear process to be followed. I suggest this process:

1) Ask yourself, what is my feeling about the ethical issue? What are your assumptions and bias which influence your decision? How would you judge the ethical situation? Allow the following process to question your assumptions and pre-judgements.

2) Gather as much relevant information about the ethical situation as it is sensible, including:
   - The present (scientific) understanding of the situation. Don’t guess or assume you know.
   - The legal, social or political implications. You need to be aware of the implications of your decision even if they do not affect your decision.
   - Information about the specific case you are considering.

3) Consider the Biblical tradition which may be applicable to the situation:
   - Rules or commands. For example, the Ten Commandments. Are there any reasons for applying specific commands; are there reasons for putting them aside?
   - Principles. For example, the Summary of the Law or list of spiritual gifts. Be aware that there may be different interpretations of the principles.
   - Stories. Try to look for stories which imply different positions in order to challenge your bias.
   - Symbols or Grand Themes. Ask such questions as: What would God’s kingdom be like in this situation? What does a Creator God imply?

4) Consider the tradition of the Church. What have the traditions of the Church taught? Are there reasons we should not follow the tradition of the Church; for example, do we now have a different understanding of humanity which would affect this.

5) Consider different ethical systems and use the ones which are most appropriate:
   - Are there some rules which we should follow without exception (Kant)?
   - Should we weigh up the likelihood of different outcomes (Utilitarianism)? On what basis would we judge the outcome: more happiness or greater love/charity or less environmental destruction?
   - The most loving course of action may be different in different particular circumstances (Situation ethics), so you may need to think about specific hypothetical cases which would give rise to different decisions.
   - What would bring about a good character or a good society (Virtue ethics)?
   - Are there other ethical systems which are applicable to the case?

6) What do current Christian ethicists or theologians say? Read some books; look on the web. Read people who argue different positions so that you understand why they hold their position and also that your own assumptions and bias are challenged.

7) Weigh up all the above: you will need ‘practical reasoning’ or wisdom – as well as common sense – to come to a conclusion.