

“Situation Ethics”

1961

A book by Joseph Fletcher, an Episcopal priest, a member of the Euthanasia Educational Council, and an advocate for Planned Parenthood. He was a supporter of both euthanasia and abortion.

Situation Ethics, according to Fletcher's model, states that decision-making should be based upon the circumstances of a particular situation, and not upon fixed Law.

i. e., the situation determines what one should do!

Fletcher - The only absolute is Love. Love should be the motive behind every decision.

As long as Love is your intention, the end justifies the means. Justice is not in the letter of the Law, it is in the distribution of Love. Fletcher founded his model upon a statement found in the New Testament of the Bible that reads, "God is Love" (I John 4:8).

This theology is contradictory to Scripture!

"This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome" (I John 5:3). Fletcher held that any commandment may be broken in good conscience if Love is one's intention.

The Bible states that the keeping God's commandments is loving God. To break any commandment, therefore, is to not love God. Therefore, logic holds that the breaking of a commandment may not be done while loving God.

Consider two laws of God coming into conflict
with one another.

Mark 16:15 And He said to them, "Go into all
the world and preach the gospel to all creation.

Rom 13:1 Let every person be in subjection to
the governing authorities.

Love for God would entail obeying both
commands.

Peter and John were called before the Sanhedrin (the authorities, Acts 3, 4), who then “commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.”

They faced a dilemma.

What should be done? Which command of God should they obey?

Mark 16:15 And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.

Rom 13:1 Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities.

Clearly, man plays a part in one of the
commands and so they answered,
“Judge for yourselves whether it is right
in God’s sight to obey you rather than
God” (Acts 4:19).

When man’s commands conflict with
God’s commands, God wins – every
time!

These actions are repeated by the authorities in Acts 5.17 where Peter and John were put in jail.

An angel of the Lord told them to ignore the authorities. Acts

5:19 But an angel of the Lord during the night opened the gates of the prison, and taking them out he said, 20 "Go your way, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life."

When questioned about their disobedience to the authorities about their actions, they replied, Acts 5:29 ... “We must obey God rather than men.”

When the situation arises that we must make a decision about whom to obey, the interference of men in God's law cannot be obeyed.

Peter and John - preaching the gospel in
Jerusalem

Allen Malone - preaching the gospel in
Viet Nam

Darrell Hymel - preaching the gospel in
China

Clearly there was a situation and the apostles then, and Allen and Darrell now, had to decide what to do. On the basis of God's commands, they taught the gospel and ignored the authorities to the extent possible.

Jesus too, was confronted by a situation
of God's law.

Matt 12:1 At that time Jesus went on the
Sabbath through the grainfields, and His
disciples became hungry and began to
pick the heads of grain and eat. 2 But
when the Pharisees saw it, they said to
Him, "Behold, Your disciples do what is
not lawful to do on a Sabbath."

Clearly, they had broken the law.

We should reflect upon the words
of Jesus to the religious leaders:
“If you had known what these
words mean, ‘I desire mercy, not
sacrifice,’ you would not have
condemned the innocent” Mt
12:7.

Jesus said they were innocent of sin and that the sinners were those who complained about their breaking of the Law.

As a faithful child of God, have you ever missed a service because you were sick? Did you sin?

I'm sure most of you would say,
“No, I was providentially
hindered,” if you had heard some
preacher speak on the subject.

Did you ever think for a moment
that should you die, God would
not take you home?

Have you ever looked for that
verse on “providential
hindrance?”

If so, you need to remember Jesus' words to the Pharisees, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice,"

"God is the one absolute basis for all laws that reflect His nature, and each law is absolutely binding on the particular activity it governs."
(Norman Geisler)

If you disagree with that statement,
on what will you establish your
moral code?

On yourself? Just how smart are
you?

Why not on God!

The very first question we
have to examine in
determining what to do in a
situation is, “are there degrees
of sin?”

John 19:11 Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin."

Notice what I underlined. “Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.”

That translation is followed in the KJV, ASV, NASV, NKJV, NIV, RSV, NRSV – every major English version

Thus, Jesus Himself, says some sins are greater than others.

Under the Law of Moses, some commandments were more important than others.

Matt 23:23 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.

God does not allow us to ignore the lesser matters!

Matt 5:19 "Whoever then annuls
one of the least of these
commandments, and so teaches
others, shall be called least in the
kingdom of heaven; but whoever
keeps and teaches them, he shall
be called great in the kingdom of
heaven.

Matt 22:36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" 37 And He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38

"This is the great and foremost commandment. 39 "The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 "On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

If we think about Geisler's statement, we see it is confirmed by Scripture.

“God is the one absolute basis for all laws that reflect His nature, and each law is absolutely binding on the particular activity it governs.”

Since there are different levels in God's laws, there may be times in which moral conflicts in which an individual cannot obey both commands of God simultaneously are unavoidable.

Can one deceive and still be innocent? Rahab hid the spies, who were involved in espionage, from Israel's enemies and then lied to save their lives (Joshua 2:1-7).

Josh 2:8 Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof 9 and said to them, "I know that the LORD has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. 10 We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed.

11 When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below. 12 Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign 13 that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and that you will save us from death."

At the birth of Moses, did God
countenance sin?

The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew
midwives, “When you help the Hebrew
women in childbirth and observe them
on the delivery stool, if it is a boy, kill
him; but if it is a girl, let her live.”

That law of Pharaoh was a sin and
should have been disobeyed.

The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live. Then the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, “Why have you done this? Why have you let the boys live?” The midwives answered Pharaoh, “Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive.”

So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous (Exodus 1:15-20).

“Some would prefer calling this not a “lie” but an “intentional falsification.” Call it what we will, it does not change the fact that it would be morally wrong - unless, of course, one is obeying a higher moral law in so doing.” - Geisler

We must obey God!

Would you allow Him to wash
you in the blood?

Acts 22:16 'And now why do you
delay? Arise, and be baptized, and
wash away your sins, calling on
His name.'