

“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).

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 we
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

Darrel Hymel - preaching the
gospel in China

Clearly there was a situation and the apostles, Allen and Darrell 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 you?

No – 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.

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.

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.'