

- As humanism (an outlook or system of thought attaching prime importance to human rather than divine or supernatural matters.) advances, the notion that there is no absolute standard of morality is being pushed as truth harder and harder by those who hold to that belief. The belief of there being no absolute standard of morality goes hand in hand with the similar belief that there is no such thing as absolute truth. This type of thinking is becoming more and more popular, and we will begin to see it more and more often as the days and years go by. Men will continue to give every effort to separate themselves from the idea of there being an almighty Creator. On the other hand, those who believe in God would argue that God has given us a moral standard to live by, and the Bible contains that standard of morality. The humanist would strongly disagree with this and say that every decision must be made on a case by case basis. Their idea of morality isn't a set standard, but instead they would practice situational ethics. "Situational ethics takes into account the particular context of an act when evaluating it ethically, rather than judging it according to absolute moral standards." We, as Christians, recognize this as being an invalid way to approach morality because God has set for a standard for man to live by. We understand that murder is wrong. We understand that lying is wrong. We understand that stealing is wrong. We understand that cheating on our spouse is wrong. However, the situational ethics proponent would say that these types of things are acceptable depending on the situation. I'm sure it isn't shocking to you to hear a non-believer support this type of thinking.
- Would you be surprised to know that there are actually believers in God that try to push situational ethics as an acceptable practice in decision making? Joseph Fletcher, a professor of social ethics for the Harvard School of Divinity in the middle 1900s and an Episcopalian, gives this explanation of situational ethics as a valid practice for the Christian, "For the situationalist there are no rules - none at all...circumstances alter rules and principles... all laws and rules and principles and ideals and norms, are only contingent, only valid if they happen to serve love in any situation...the Christian chooses what he believes to be the demands of love in the present situation... The new morality, situation ethics declares that anything and everything is right or wrong, according to the situation." Fletcher is certainly not alone in his thoughts and beliefs concerning situational ethics. Some Christians have even used the Bible as evidence for the validity of situational ethics. Their go to passage is **Matthew 12:1-8**. They would argue that this story of Jesus can be used to justify just about any sin if we are doing it for God or out of love for another. So let's use our time to read through this text and see if Jesus is endorsing or using the practice of situational ethics.

I. Jesus' disciples did not sin when they picked the heads of grain.

- A. This action of picking grain to eat as they are traveling does not violate the law by any means.
 1. The prohibition of work was intended for that work which was laborious in nature, the daily grind of life. **(Exodus 20:9,10)**
 2. The travel of Jesus and the disciples was acceptable because they were on their way to the temple to worship.
 3. The disciples were also not guilty of stealing from their neighbor because the law made provisions for the traveling person. **(Deut. 23:24,25)**
 4. There is no legitimate claim that can show that the disciples had sinned by their actions in this text.
 5. Jesus puts the whole situation to rest when He states in v.7 that the disciples were innocent of this charge.
- B. The only thing they violated was the tradition of the elders.
 1. The Pharisees habitually elevated their traditions as doctrine to the neglect of actual commandments from God. **(eating with unwashed hands, Mark 7:8,9)**
 2. They made the Sabbath more strict than it had to be and it had become a burden on the people. **(Mark 2:27)**
 3. The law made provisions for the priest to be able to do their work on the Sabbath, but that work would actually violate the elders traditions. Why didn't the Pharisees make a big deal about them? **(v.5)**
 4. The Pharisees were nothing but a bunch of hypocrites looking for Jesus to make some sort of mistake.

II. The sins of others do not give us free pass to sin.

- A. Some would point to Jesus and His speaking of David to show that David could sin and get away with it so Jesus' disciples could sin in this way and get away with it as well.
 - 1. This means we can steal what we need or want because we were wrongly cheated out of a job.
 - 2. This means we can divorce for whatever reason that we were treated wrong by our spouse.
 - 3. This means we can take justice into our own hands and murder someone who hurt us in some way.
- B. Jesus is not condoning the actions of David and using them as an excuse for His disciples to sin. Instead, He is pointing out the hypocrisy of the Pharisees.
 - 1. They revered David as being great, yet they were inconsistent in their judgments.
 - 2. David actually did something that was unlawful for him to do and the Pharisees didn't make a big deal out of it.
 - 3. The disciples didn't do anything wrong, yet the Pharisees condemned their lawful actions.
 - 4. Jesus was simply pointing out the inconsistent hypocrisy of the Pharisees. He was not condoning David's actions in an effort to excuse the disciples' supposed sin.
- C. We cannot justify our sin by the actions of others.
 - 1. We cannot steal just because we were cheated out of money.
 - 2. We cannot divorce our spouse just for just any reason that they do us wrong.
 - 3. We cannot murder someone just because they did us wrong.
 - 4. We cannot sin in any way just because someone else did the same thing.

III. Sin is never acceptable in God's sight.

- A. We cannot use God or love for others as an excuse to disobey God. The story of Saul and the Amalekites in **I Samuel 15** teaches us that obedience to God is always a must.
 - 1. Saul was commanded to destroy everything. Nothing was to be left alive. **(v.3)**
 - 2. Saul destroyed everything... except Agag and the best of the livestock. **(vv.8,9)**
 - 3. Saul said that he would use the livestock as offerings to God. He thought that God would be pleased with his efforts to sacrifice to Him. **(v.15)**
 - 4. God was greatly displeased with Saul and said he valued obedience far more than sacrifice. **(v.22)**
 - 5. Because of Saul's disobedience he would be rejected as king of Israel. **(v.23)**
- B. Jesus makes a very similar point from **Hosea 6:1-6** in **v.7**. God wants our obedience and loyalty over anything else.
- C. If we want to be pleasing to God then we must hold to His standard and not compromise.
 - 1. Any person can claim they are doing something wrong for the name of God. That doesn't make it right.
 - 2. Sometimes it will be difficult to make the decision that falls in line with the standard of God.
 - 3. **Example:** A Christian lady who is a single mom has a job where she sells a product. She gets a new boss and that boss instructs the lady employees to wear tighter clothes, lower shirts, and shorter bottoms to make more sales to male clients through seduction. She seems caught between a rock and hard place because she has the responsibility to feed and provide for her family, but she knows that God wants His people to be pure in all their actions. She decides that God will understand because her kids need to be fed so she goes along with her boss's wishes. This is not acceptable in the eyes of God. We cannot make excuses to sin in order to accomplish a perceived good.
 - 4. The decisions may very well be difficult, but through much study, prayer, and prioritizing by God's standard we can make the right decisions without sacrificing our obedience to God.

The bottomline is that God has a standard for us to follow. Humanists don't like that because they would rather make the decision that is best for them and their interest. We live not for ourselves, but for God. May He always help us to have the courage to follow His word even when the choice seems difficult. May we always trust in Him, and have faith that He will provide the way of escape for us and eventually save us in the end.