



**“Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (Isaiah 5:20).**

### **Situation Ethics**

**Central Truth:** There is a divine standard of right and wrong which applies to all situations.

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I remember the time, years ago, when it was common for young people to ask their pastor, “Is it wrong to do . . .?” and they would name some activity. It has been years since I have been asked that question by anyone, younger or older.

Is it because our generation has become so much wiser and knows the answers? No. It is because the line between right and wrong has been erased in the minds of some and has grown dim in the minds of others. The problem is a philosophy we call situation ethics.

Think about that term “situation ethics.” An ethic is a standard of conduct which distinguishes right from wrong on the basis of objective truth. If a thing is ethical, it is moral, upright, virtuous, pure, good, decent, honorable, and appropriate. A situation is the combination of circumstances at a given time and place. The two words are honorable. But put them together in the currently accepted concept and you have trouble.

### **Definition of Situation Ethics**

Situation ethics is the belief that an act is neither right nor wrong in itself. The situation in which it is performed is what makes it right or wrong. Therefore, it denies that there is a standard of right and wrong which applies to all persons, in all circumstances, at all times, in all places. (There can be no objective standard of right and wrong if a thing can be right in one

situation and wrong in another.) Situation ethics is a spiritual virus which will destroy your moral character and your spiritual health. It is a blight which has brought a curse upon our generation.

Situation ethics appears in many ways. A thing is not said to be wrong, for instance, if it is “between consenting adults.” Or a thing is permissible “if no one is hurt.” Almost any act is justified because “I have a right to be happy.” Even gross immorality is permitted because “it is natural desire.” But in whatever situation it may be applied, situation ethics is contrary to the Holy Scriptures and condemned by a holy God.

A person who believes that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God cannot live by situation ethics. Instead, he lives under the principle, “*To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them*” (Isaiah 8:20). The Bible, not the situation, determines whether a thing is right or wrong.

### **Consequences of Situation Ethics**

Suppose our society was governed by situation ethics (which it is in large part). What would happen as a result?

**Sexual immorality would be commonly practiced.** It would be excused as “a natural desire which is no more wrong than a thirsty person taking a drink of water, if it is between consenting adults and no one is hurt.” If society lived by that principle, sexual promiscuity would be so commonplace that no one would be expected to live a moral lifestyle.

What does God say? Exodus 20:14 reads, “*Thou shalt not commit adultery.*” God was so serious about that; He set a death penalty upon the person who violated that law (Leviticus 20:10). God does not take the situation into consideration. A moral violation, in any situation, is rebellion against the clear command of God.

Why do so many people cast off moral restraints and pretend there is no standard by which they should live? What can be said of those whose immorality would cause an ally cat to blush for shame? God answers, “*Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves*” (Romans 1:24). Let them use whatever excuse they may; God declares them guilty.

**Sexual perversion would be excused.** “After all,” the argument would go, “it is between consenting adults.” And that excuse is valid if there is no standard of right and wrong.

Even a casual reading of Judges 19, 20 shows that ancient Israel held homosexuality in such contempt that an entire tribe in Israel was almost

totally destroyed because of the sexual perversion within it.

Leviticus 20:13 reads, *“If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.”*

Romans 1:26-32 shows the downward course of those who reject God's standards of right and wrong. First, their sexual appetites are unrestrained (verse 26). Then homosexual activity becomes common (verse 27). Finally, they become unable to discern between good and evil because their minds are reprobate (verse 28). Three times the Bible pronounces the fatal words, “God gave them up” or “God gave them over.” He lets those people receive in their own bodies (through AIDS and other diseases) the appropriate reward due for their rebellious lifestyle.

Hear this solemn warning: *“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap”* (Galatians 6:7). That underscores the divine standard of right and wrong. Beware!

**Divorce would be common and without shame.** “After all,” the excuse might be given, “I have a right to be happy, and I can't be happy with my present partner.” God does not give you a right to be happy except as you are happy in holy conduct which comes from obeying His Word. But if situation ethics is the rule, you have a right to break this marriage and to enter another if the present situation makes you uncomfortable. In a society where one marriage out of two ends in divorce, it seems that situation ethics is having a heyday in our homes.

**Abortion would be practiced without guilt or regret.** A woman would argue, “I have a right to my own body.” No one should tell her no if situation ethics rules. Whatever may be an inconvenience or a seeming hardship would be removed, even if it takes the life of an unborn child.

But what does God say? Exodus 21:22-25 pronounces the death penalty upon one who causes a woman to abort her unborn child. *“Thou shalt give life for life,”* is what God says. Read that passage, if you have any doubts about how God feels toward the 1,600,000 unborn babies who are killed in their mother's wombs each year in our nation. How can we escape the judgment of God for such wholesale slaughter?

**Dishonesty would be justified.** The saying, “The end justifies the means” would be a common rule of life. As long as a person can say, “I have a right to . . .,” he can use whatever means are appropriate to get what he desires. That is the way some countries operate in the international community. A treaty is valid so long as it serves their interest, but it is ignored when it does not. Is that the way for a stable society to function?

Look what God says. He requires just weights and measures in business

dealings (Leviticus 19:36). He says, “*A false balance is abomination to the LORD: but a just weight is his delight*” (Proverbs 11:1). That means that God rejects situation ethics as the rule by which people live.

There is a divine standard of right and wrong which applies to all people, in all situations, at all times. It is based on the inspired Scriptures and never changes from generation to generation.

## **Remedy for Situation Ethics**

How shall a Christian live in a generation which has so largely accepted situation ethics as its standard? He will live by the principles of right and wrong set forth in the Bible. Here are four principles to guide the Christian.

**Determine the standard of truth.** It is not public opinion, which varies from person to person and time to time. It is not educated speculation, which is changing and subject to human error. It is not religious philosophy, as there are so many in the world. The standard of truth is the inspired and infallible Word of God, the Holy Bible. It is the standard by which all opinions are to be judged. (Read Isaiah 8:20.) The words recorded in the Bible will be the principles by which we are judged at the last day (John 12:48).

**Arrange for personal accountability.** Enter a relationship with a mature Christian to whom you can report and who will hold you accountable. Such a Paul-Timothy relationship will help you to grow spiritually and live honorably. And remember that you will surely account to God at the last day.

**Expect to be rewarded and disciplined as God's Word determines.** Jesus said, “*Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be*” (Revelation 22:12). He rewards and disciplines both in this life and at the final judgment yet to come. You will account to Him personally at that day (Romans 14:12).

**Teach the younger generation that there is an objective standard of truth—the Holy Scriptures—which we must learn and obey.** Psalm: 78 shows how one generation passes to the next a report of “*the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done*” (verse 4). That will cause the next generation to “*set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments*” (verse 7). We are only one generation away from paganism. Each generation must teach the next. And we must be sure that Christian principles are passed on to our children and our grandchildren.

Yes, God has set a standard of conduct in the Bible. Therefore, live by

God's standard, whatever the world does or says. A thing is right because it agrees with God. A thing is wrong because it disagrees with God. God never changes; so the standard of right and wrong never changes.

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. Why do we need an objective standard of truth?
2. Why does the world deny that there is such a standard?
3. How would you define situation ethics?
4. Why is it such a dangerous philosophy of life?
5. What evils do you see in our current society as a consequence of following situation ethics?
6. Where can you find the correct standard of right and wrong?
7. Why should the Christian continue for life in Bible study?
8. How are we judged by the divine standard in this life?
9. How will we be judged by that standard at the end of time?
10. How can you be sure you are living by God's standard?