

MORAL
RELATIVISM AND SITUATION
ETHICS

OUR AGE OF MORAL RELATIVISM

- ❖ **What is it?** Relativism – the doctrine that knowledge, truth, and morality exist in relation to culture, society, or historical context, and are not absolute. (New Oxford American Dictionary)
- ❖ **Why is the position taken?** It makes man the arbiter of his own life choices.
- ❖ **Why does it not work?** Everything is left to man to decide, and there are conflicting conclusions. There is no right answer.
- ❖ **What are the consequences?** Men are left to a “*debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting*” (Romans 1:28).

SITUATION ETHICS

A Type of Relativism Adopted by Many Who Profess to be Christians

- ❖ Joseph Fletcher, Author of “Situation Ethics”
 - ❖ “As we shall see, Christian situation ethics has only one norm or principle or law (call it what you will) that is binding and unexceptionable, always good and right regardless of the circumstances. That is ‘love’ – the agape of the summary commandments to love God and the neighbor” (Joseph Fletcher, Situation Ethics, 30).

SITUATION ETHICS

A Type of Relativism Adopted by Many Who Profess to be Christians

- ❖ Joseph Fletcher, Author of “Situation Ethics”
 - ❖ “For the situationist there are no rules – none at all” (55); “Circumstances alter rules and principles” (29); “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” (30, 55). “The new morality, situation ethics, declares that anything and everything is right or wrong, according to the situation” (124). (Ibid.)

SITUATION ETHICS

Supposed Authority for Situation Ethics (*Matthew 12:1-8*)

- ❖ Interpretation for situation Ethics:
 - ❖ (v. 2) – their accusation was correct.
 - ❖ (vv. 3-4) – Jesus uses David as an example of the situation excusing something unlawful.
 - ❖ (v. 5) – Jesus uses the example of the Priests on the Sabbath to excuse what is unlawful.

SITUATION ETHICS

Supposed Authority for Situation Ethics (*Matthew 12:1-8*)

- ❖ What was Jesus really saying?
 - ❖ (v. 2) – Jesus does not grant them their claim. (v. 7; cf. 7:21-24)
 - ❖ (vv. 3-4) – Jesus noted David’s actions were “not lawful.” The Pharisees excused David’s actions, yet condemn the disciples’ lawful actions.
 - ❖ (vv. 5-6) – Jesus shows by the actions of the priests, who were “*blameless*,” that the Sabbath did not condemn all work.
 - ❖ (v. 8) – Jesus shows that He is the authority of the Sabbath, thus knows Sabbath law.

SITUATION ETHICS

The Standard of Ethics Christ Established

❖ Love?

- ❖ *Matthew 22:36-40* – hangs all the Law and Prophets.
- ❖ *John 14:15* – keep commandments.
- ❖ *1 John 5:1-2* – keep commandments.
- ❖ *Philippians 1:9-11* – knowledge and discernment, approve what is excellent, bear fruits of righteousness.
- ❖ Standard of judgment – *John 12:48; Romans 2:16*

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