

Appointing Myself as Judge

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

Introduction:

- A. Prov. 14:12; 1Cor. 11:31
- B. The world reasons that what is morally right can change based on the situation and circumstances.
 - 1. In any situation, humankind claims that there is an absolute right choice, but that it doesn't remain fixed in all situations.
 - 2. That what is wrong in most situations may be right in other situations.
- C. Defining terms
 - 1. Absolute morality is a fixed standard of what is right and wrong, regardless of context, consequence, or intentions. This standard is independent of custom or individual opinion.
 - 2. Moral relativism means that the standard of right and wrong may be changed by an individual or by a societal group. What is right for one may not be right for another.
 - a. It claims that there is no absolute, universal standard for everyone.
 - b. Those who claim that it is wrong to judge others subscribe to moral relativism, whether they realize it or not.
 - 3. Situation ethics - Joseph Fletcher is considered the father of this.
 - a. He stressed "freedom from prefabricated decisions and prescriptive rules" [Moral Responsibility, p. 7]
 - b. He defined it as relative, non-absolute, variant, and non-universal.
 - c. The rules change, not based on an individual or group, but on the nature of the current situation.
 - d. It is actually a form of consequential morality, where right or wrong is determined by the outcome of the decision.
 - e. Fletcher defined it as "the relative weight of the ends and means and motive and consequences all taken together, as weighed by love." [Moral Responsibility, p. 23]
 - f. In short, whatever generates the greatest "love" is the best choice. Since one cannot know all outcomes in advance, he makes decisions based on his intention to produce the greatest amount of "love." However, "love" is not really defined in situation ethics, so it isn't surprising that it devolves into personal feelings, and therefore becomes moral relativism.
 - 4. Moral relativists will agree that there is a moral absolute, but that it is not in the law but rather in the desired outcome. Therefore, if something morally right results from a morally wrong choice, then it doesn't matter if a law was broken to obtain that result.
 - a. Illustration: During WWII, a Polish woman engaged in fornication with German soldiers to distract them from looking for Jewish refugees hiding in her home.

- b. While they would argue that sex outside of a committed relationship may be wrong, when it is used to save a life, it is morally justified
- c. In their philosophy, there are moral absolutes where the situation makes exceptions to the moral law to uphold what they view as a moral good.
- d. They appoint themselves judges of God and His word

I. CONTRADICTIONS AND CONFLICTS

- A. Their reasoning is based on verbal gymnastics
 - 1. They argue that killing is sometimes right and sometimes wrong.
 - a. Murder, defined as immoral killing, is wrong
 - b. But a death penalty for a condemned murderer or killing in self-defense is right
 - 2. They then claim that lying is the same. It can be right or wrong based on the situation.
 - 3. But here is the flaw: All murder is killing, but all killing is not murder.
 - a. Murder is defined in the scriptures as the intentional killing of another with malice toward the victim - Num. 35:20-21
 - b. Manslaughter, the intentional killing of another is also defined as wrong, though carried a different sentence - Num. 35:22-23
 - c. Death penalties were a different class of killing, done by a judgment of evidence and multiple witnesses - Num. 35:30
 - d. Self-defense is permitted - Prov. 24:11; Ex. 22:2-3; Neh. 4:14
 - e. Does the morality of taking a life change based on the situation?
 - f. Yes, but the criteria is defined by God, not man, and within those criteria, right and wrong doesn't change
 - 4. But lying cannot be right or wrong because it is always defined as wrong - Rev. 21:8; Prov. 12:22
- B. It bases decisions on what each one perceives to be the best short-term outcome to any moral dilemma.
 - 1. Situational ethics uses the human view of a situation to decide the best course of action - Jer. 10:23
 - 2. We have limited knowledge of situations. We might be able to guess at a few short term outcomes, but not long term results
 - 3. For example, who would deliberately choose hardship and persecution for himself or those he loves? - James 1:2-4
 - a. Those who are trusting God for long term good rather than choosing to sin for short term benefits
 - b. The prophets died under persecution - Matt. 5:12
 - c. Paul went to prison and eventual execution - Acts 21:11-14
 - d. Was the suffering and death of Jesus good? - Matt. 26:39
 - e. The short term is painful, but the long term is glorious
- C. It judges the law
 - 1. Situation ethics allow people to decide which law is more important and permits them to break the laws they judge as immoral.

- a. Deut. 12:32; Isa. 55:8-9
- 2. One sin is not worse than another - James 2:8-11
- 3. Jesus taught that all truth is to be followed - Matt. 23:23
- 4. It is better to suffer for doing good - 1Peter 3:17, 14
- D. It sets up a false dichotomy or dilemma
 - 1. They assume that there only two choices.
 - a. Lying to protect the lives of those in your house or they are killed
 - b. There is the option of saying nothing at all or talking about everything else but the lie - 1Sam. 16:2
 - 2. There is always a way to do the right thing - 1Cor. 10:13

II. GOD DEMANDS MORAL ABSOLUTES

- A. Sin is violation of law, period. - 1John 3:4
 - 1. Situation ethics turns this from a definitive to a "could be"
- B. Uzzah - 2Sam. 6:3, 6-7
 - 1. Does he let the Ark of the Covenant fall and possibly break, or does he touch it in violation of the law? - Num. 4:15
 - 2. Situation ethics say that touching it is a lesser infraction, and that both David and Uzzah's intentions were good.
 - 3. By all intents and purposes in situation ethics, the infraction was justified, yet God ended Uzzah's life.
 - a. They ignore the fact that if they had carried the ark as God ordered, none of this would have happened - 1Chron. 15:12-13
 - b. The violation came when they put the ark on a cart; touching the ark was a consequence of the first sin. It is committing a second sin to correct the first sin.
- C. One cannot sin to generate good - Rom. 3:8
 - 1. Grace is good, but do not sin to generate more grace - Rom. 5:20 - 6:2
- D. Trust God in doing good regardless of the short term outcome - 1Peter 4:19
 - 1. Situation ethics doesn't trust that God's laws are always right

III. WE MAY NOT ADJUST OR IGNORE GOD'S ABSOLUTES

- A. Gal. 1:6-10
- B. Situation ethics is an arrogant attempt to judge God's laws and justify changing them to suit one's perceptions of their current situation.
- C. We must have more reverence for God than this - John 14:15
- D. God knows better than any man what is good for that man.
 - 1. Isa. 33:22; James 4:11-12; Matt. 10:28