

Is Situational Ethics Right?

Rahab, King David, and Jesus' Disciples

May 30th, 2022

Situation Ethics: The New Morality

- ❖ Joseph F Fletcher released this book in 1966
- ❖ Altruistic or Sacrificial Adultery
- ❖ “Absolute positions paid no attention to the complexity and uniqueness of the situation and could result in a callous and inhumane way of dealing with the problem.
- ❖ “Fletcher insists that we must enter every situation with only one moral weapon—the law of *agape* love. He says: “Only the command to love is categorically good. We are obliged to tell the truth, for example, only if the situation calls for it.”

Situation Ethics: The New Morality

1. Love only is always good

Actions are only good if they help humans (showing love for one another) and they are bad if they hurt people.

2. Love is the only norm

Jesus and St Paul replaced the Torah with the principle of love, in the past Christians have broken the 10 Commandments in order to do the right thing e.g. Bonhoeffer tried to kill Hitler

6. Love decides there and then

Whether something is right or wrong depends on the situation and can't be pre-determined

The 6 Fundamental Principles

3. Love and justice are the same, and love is justice distributed

Love and justice can not be separated.

5. Love is the only means

When weighing up a situation, one must consider what you want the outcome to be and what you need to do to get there. Fletcher said the end must be the most loving thing

4. Love wills the neighbour's good, whether we like him or not.

Your neighbour is anybody and agape love goes out to everyone

Situation Ethics

AGAPE

- A correct moral action is the one that produces the most loving result

Pragmatism

A Ethic should that should be followed only if it can work & produce good results

Positivism

Asserts love as the over riding principle

Personism

Ethics centered around people and not impersonal at all

Relativism

Obviously Situation ethics has a huge amount of relativism, however it still accepts the rule of love

The Bible's view on Situational Ethics

- ❖ Is this view Biblical?
- ❖ Several different names:
 - ❖ Moral relativism
 - ❖ Situation or Situational Ethics
 - ❖ Ends justify the means

The Bible's view on Situational Ethics

❖ There is one truth

Ephesians 4:4-6 "There is] one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who [is] above all, and through all, and in you all."

The Bible's view on Situational Ethics

- ❖ God expects obedience, no matter the motive (2 Samuel 6 and Uzzah)
 - ❖ Did Uzzah's decide how to move the ark? NO
 - ❖ Was he trying to save the ark? YES
 - ❖ Did that matter? NO
 - ❖ What happened? Uzzah died

The Bible's view on Situational Ethics

- ❖ God expects obedience, no matter the motive (1 Samuel 13 and King Saul unlawful sacrifice)
- ❖ Did Saul wait for Samuel? Yes, seven days
- ❖ Was Saul looking to God for an answer? Yes
- ❖ Would this give comfort to the army? Yes
- ❖ Was Saul authorized to perform a sacrifice? NO
- ❖ What happened? The kingdom was removed from Saul.

The Bible's view on Situational Ethics

SO WHY THE CONFUSION?

Rahab, the Harlot
Joshua 2

King David and the
Disciples
Matthew 12

The Bible's view on Situational Ethics

❖ Did Rahab lie?

Joshua 2:4-5 ““Then the woman took the two men and hid them. So she said, “Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from.” And it happened as the gate was being shut, when it was dark, that the men went out. Where the men went I do not know; pursue them quickly, for you may overtake them.””

Joshua 2:6 “(But she had brought them up to the roof and hidden them with the stalks of flax, which she had laid in order on the roof.)”

Joshua 2:8 “Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof,”

The Bible's view on Situational Ethics

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The Bible's view on Situational Ethics

- ❖ Bible Critics: Rahab proves God is inconsistent
- ❖ Philosophers/Christians: Lying isn't always bad

Proverbs 12:22 "Lying lips *are* an abomination to the Lord, but those who deal truthfully *are* His delight."

Joshua 2:9-21 Rahab requests to be spared, spies agree

Joshua 6:22-23 ""But Joshua had said to the two men who had spied out the country, "Go into the harlot's house, and from there bring out the woman and all that she has, as you swore to her." 23 And the young men who had been spies went in and brought out Rahab, her father, her mother, her brothers, and all that she had. So they brought out all her relatives and left them outside the camp of Israel."

The Bible's view on Situational Ethics

❖ Bible Critics / Philosophers contention

Revelation 21:8 "But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.""

Hebrews 11:31 "By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace."

James 2:25 "Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent [them] out another way?"

The Bible's view on Situational Ethics

Romans 3:23 "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"

1 Peter 2:22 "Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth"

The Bible's view on Situational Ethics

- ❖ Was everyone perfect, without sin in Hebrews 11?
 - ❖ Moses disobeyed God (Numbers 20:1-12)
 - ❖ Noah became intoxicated (Genesis 9:21)
 - ❖ Abraham told lies because he feared death (Genesis 12:12-20 and 20:1-18)

The Bible's view on Situational Ethics

- ❖ What about Peter (Disciple, Preacher, Apostle, Elder)?
 - ❖ Elder (1 Peter 5:1)
 - ❖ Lacked Faith (Matthew 14:31)
 - ❖ Denied the Lord (Matthew 26:69-75)
 - ❖ Hypocrite (Galatians 2:11-13)
 - ❖ Yet, Peter was preacher, penned two New Testament epistles, served as an apostle
 - ❖ Why?

The Bible's view on Situational Ethics

1 John 1:5-10 "This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us [our] sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us."

The Bible's view on Situational Ethics

Joshua 2:9-11 ""and said to the men: "I know that the LORD has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you. 10 "For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who [were] on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. 11 "And as soon as we heard [these things], our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the LORD your God, He [is] God in heaven above and on earth beneath.""

The Bible's view on Situational Ethics

Deuteronomy 12:31 ““You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way; for every abomination to the Lord which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods.”

Leviticus 18:25 ““For the land is defiled; therefore I visit the punishment of its iniquity upon it, and the land vomits out its inhabitants.”

The Bible's view on Situational Ethics

The faith and works of Rahab

1. Rahab confessed her belief in Jehovah
2. She appealed to the spies for help
3. She showed kindness to the Israelite spies
4. She courageously hid them
5. Gave the spies specific instruction on how to escape the City
6. She told the spies what to do when they got out of the City
7. She kept secret the destruction facing Jericho
8. She followed their instruction to bound the scarlet cord in her window
9. She gathered her parents and other family members in her house

The Bible's view on Situational Ethics

Mathew 12:1-8 ""At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. And His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. 2 And when the Pharisees saw [it], they said to Him, "Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!" 3 But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: 4 "how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? 5 "Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? 6 "Yet I say to you that in this place there is [One] greater than the temple. 7 "But if you had known what [this] means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. 8 "For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.""

The Bible's view on Situational Ethics

The typical accusation here is that Jesus, the Son of God, endorsed David's practice of situation ethics, and, thereby, justified the law-breaking conduct of his own disciples.

This was one of Joseph Fletcher proof texts. He contended that Jesus "blessed David's act on the basis of the situation." And so, he argued, it is clear that "only the end justifies the means: nothing else"

The Bible's view on Situational Ethics

Mathew 12:1 ““At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. And His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat.

❖ Did the disciples sin? NO

❖ Deuteronomy 23:24-25

❖ Exodus 12:16 “On the first day [there shall be] a holy convocation, and on the seventh day there shall be a holy convocation for you. No manner of work shall be done on them; but [that] which everyone must eat--that only may be prepared by you.”

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The Bible's view on Situational Ethics

Mathew 12:2 "And when the Pharisees saw [it], they said to Him, "Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!""

- ❖ Where the restrictions for the Sabbath? YES
- ❖ Did the Disciples violate a command? NO
 - ❖ Matthew 15:2-3, 9 "Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread." 3 He answered and said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? ... 9 And in vain they worship Me, Teaching [as] doctrines the commandments of men.'""

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Mathew 12:3-4 "But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: 4 "how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests?"

❖ 1 Samuel 21:1-6

❖ Could David eat the showbread? NO

❖ Leviticus 24:9 "And it shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in a holy place; for it [is] most holy to him from the offerings of the LORD made by fire, by a perpetual statute."

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The Bible's view on Situational Ethics

Mathew 12:5 "Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless?"

- ❖ Priest could work on the Sabbath: Numbers 28:9-10 "'And on the Sabbath day two lambs in their first year, without blemish, and two-tenths [of an ephah] of fine flour as a grain offering, mixed with oil, with its drink offering-- 10 '[this is] the burnt offering for every Sabbath, besides the regular burnt offering with its drink offering."

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- ❖ Priest could work on the Sabbath: Numbers 28:9-10
- ❖ Other exceptions for the Sabbath:
 - ❖ Circumcision: John 7:22
 - ❖ Care for animals: Deuteronomy 22:1-4, Matthew 12:11
 - ❖ Helping the needy: Luke 14:1-6

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Mathew 12:6 ""Yet I say to you that in this place there is [One] greater than the temple."

- ❖ Jesus is stating, unequivocally, that he is the Son of God
- ❖ What couldn't they see? He was greater than the temple.

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Mathew 12:7 "But if you had known what [this] means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless."

- ❖ Hosea 6:6 "For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings."
- ❖ Motive and attitude were just as important as the sacrifice

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The Bible's view on Situational Ethics

Mathew 12:8 "For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

- ❖ Jesus is the Son of Man.
- ❖ Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath.
- ❖ Jesus knew the Law

The Bible's view on Situational Ethics

Mathew 12:8 "For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

- ❖ Now the real argument of Jesus is this: David, when hungry, ate the show-bread, which it was confessedly unlawful for him to eat, yet you justify him: my disciples pluck grain and eat it on the Sabbath, an act which the law does not forbid, and yet you condemn them (n.d., 104 J.W. McGarvey).

The Bible's view on Situational Ethics

There is no room for Situational Ethics
*(including moral relativism / ends
justifying the means)* in the life of a
servant of God!

The Bible's view on Situational Ethics

Hebrews 13:8-9 "Jesus Christ [is] the same yesterday, today, and forever. 9 Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For [it is] good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them."