

CHRISTIAN SITUATION ETHICS?

In today's political arena and in many other areas of society, we hear discussions concerning the ethics of certain policies or actions of individuals. It is undeniable that all of man's decisions are not "cookie cutter" obvious but rather often require an understanding of the "big picture" or other data involved with a particular situation. A recent Washington official was convicted of leaking sensitive information that could affect our nation's security. The accused didn't deny discussing the information so the trial hinged on when he was aware of the information and when he discussed it, in other words "Situation Ethics"

In Matthew chapter 12, the apostle records the complaining of the Pharisees toward Jesus and his disciples. As the disciples passed through a grain field, they plucked and ate of the food. This act was witnessed by the Pharisees who quickly made accusations against the disciples. Oh didn't I mention, the text also states that the events took place on the Sabbath day and the Pharisees claimed that the disciples were "working" in clear violation of the Law.

It is vital that we consider exactly how Jesus handled the charges because some use this text to invent a non-scriptural concept we'll call "Christian Situation Ethics" or CSE. This idea allows its follower to set aside absolute scriptural ordinances under certain conditions and maintain a clear conscience. For example, CSE would say that stealing, lying, or killing may be justified under certain conditions. In order to dispel such flawed logic we must consider several pertinent questions relative to the text.

- 1) Did Jesus' disciples break the law?
- 2) If so, did Jesus excuse the sins of His disciples?
- 3) Can we set aside God's law in an "emergency situation?"
- 4) Was Jesus teaching "Christian situational ethics?"

Man's Interpretation

Today's situational ethics trend stems from secular humanism. Humanism teaches that right and wrong are just values that are

determined based on the current situation. Secular humanism rejects the notion of a higher power and divine law. It does not accept absolutes. Christ indeed died to free us from the law (the law of sin) but he never taught that we were free from any law.

Let me offer some comments about commentaries. While I like reference materials and in the absence of face-to-face discussions concerning the scriptures use many different Bible commentaries, there is a danger with taking man's opinions at face value. One such example is given below from a commentary that I continue to prefer and read often. I differ greatly with this interpretation however.

"But it was understood that if an emergency or positive commandment called for some physical act even on the Sabbath day, then the regular law as to its observance did not apply or bind the parties to its usual observance... Lord of the Sabbath does not imply that he would belittle the law of the holy days. He was with his Father in all of the works of creation, also in the issuing of laws and dispensations for the conduct of human beings. Any lawmaking power has the right to alter its own edicts if and when it sees fit to meet an emergency, hence Jesus was within his rights in the above conduct." (Bible Commentary, E. M. Zerr, pp.41-42)

Does human need take precedence over Divine law?

Surely Jesus would have been justified in turning the stones into bread in Matthew 4 after he had gone without food for forty consecutive days. But he chose to refrain and met Satan head-on with God's word. Since fasting was a common part of Jewish life in that era, surely one day without food would not have been a very long fast. So, in this case, the real need to eat could not have been a big issue.

Does "the law of love" trump obedience to God?

Jesus taught that love requires complete obedience: "*If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments*" (John 14:15). In all cases, if an exception to a commandment exists it is stated in the scriptures. For example, in Paul's letter to the Romans 13:1-7 and Peter's first epistle 2:13-15 we are commanded to submit to the laws of the land. However, when and if the laws of the land contradict God's word an exception is stated in Acts 4:19-20 and Acts 5:29.

Did Jesus make exceptions for Himself and others?

Jesus explained that he was not on earth to change the Law of Moses but to fulfill it. In Matthew 5:18, *"For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled."* Rather, He was obedient. In Hebrews 4:15, *"For we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."* Also in Hebrews 5:8, *"Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;"*

Did Jesus defend the sin of His disciples?

A better question is did they actually commit a sin? The answer to both is no. They violated a tradition of the Pharisees, but not the Law of Moses. Matthew 12:7 clearly states that the disciples were guiltless. This is the same group of people that condemned Jesus' disciples for eating with unwashed hands in Matthew 15. Again, the Pharisees missed the fact that the Law of Moses made no such restriction rather it was the elders that later added the requirement.

Man errs if he teaches that Jesus would violate God's law. Clearly, the scripture will not support such a claim.

The Text

The law of Moses allowed for the actions of the disciples in Deuteronomy 23:25, *"When thou comest into the standing corn of thy neighbor, then thou mayest pluck the ears with thine hand; but thou shalt not move a sickle unto thy neighbor's standing corn."*

The Pharisees perceived that the disciples were performing work on the Sabbath when in fact they had not.

The example of David and the shew bread

The example refers to 1 Samuel 21. Leviticus 24:5-9 only allows for the priests to consume the bread and no exception is recorded in God's word. We should not assume that Jesus was defending David as guiltless but rather that he knew the Pharisees would never condemn the actions of a national hero such as King David.

Jesus was pointing out the inconsistency of the Pharisees in applying the Law, David versus disciples.

The priests

Jesus then pointed out that there were recorded exceptions to the basic law and the priests served as such. Though the command was not to work on the Sabbath, yet the priest were required to do so. Other exceptions are also recorded in Deuteronomy 22, later in Matthew 12, John 7, and Luke 14.

Lord of the Sabbath

As our King and High Priest, Jesus was and is superior to the Levitical priests and His work more important than theirs. However, Jesus does not at all teach that the law could be set aside but reasserts his superiority as the Son of God over the law, the Sabbath and the Temple.

ALLEN DANIEL
Woodland, AL

APOLOGIA

QUESTION: As a Christian, how do I deal with sins of the mind? This is a real problem for me. Does the Bible deal with this issue?

ANSWER: It is interesting to note that most people when they think of sin automatically think of some action that is sinful. For example Paul in Galatians 5 outlines for us the sins of the flesh as he exhorts us to walk in the Spirit. He writes:

"Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like..."

Note that he mentions the sins of adultery, murder, being drunk, and other sins that manifest conduct or actions that are unbecoming that of God's people. Because of the visibility of these sins in a person's life many have reached the conclusion that if these actions are absent then they are not sinning in this area. While it is true that sin does manifest itself in

inappropriate behavior we must not forget from whence those actions arise. They come from a heart that is sinful. Jesus said,

"For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies."
(Matt. 15:19)

Here we find that Jesus targets sin from where it originates. It is from within in our minds that sin is found. Many times we have sinned long before we have actually committed the act! This was the problem with the Pharisees of Jesus time. They went to great length to clean the outside (control their behavior) but inwardly (that is in their heart) they were full of sin.

This was the central theme of Jesus' teaching in His Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 5. He began His discourse by pointing out that in His kingdom one must have a degree of righteousness that exceeded that of the Scribes and Pharisees.

"For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 5:20)

He then proceeds to give examples of what He meant. He shows in verses 21-26, that murder is a sin of the heart. When we hate and despise others in our minds then we are guilty of murder before our holy God. He also illustrates the same when he touches on adultery. He tells us that to lust after another is to commit adultery in our hearts.

Perhaps it would be beneficial to discuss what we mean when we use the word heart as it is employed in this context. The heart is the inner man. It is composed of our mind (thought center), emotions, and feelings. It is our mind that impacts our emotions and feelings and ultimately our actions. Simply put, what we think determines what we feel and what we do! This is the reason that Jesus tells us that sin is a heart issue and not limited to behavior only. In addition to the teachings of Jesus we add the Wisdom of Solomon.

"Keep your heart with all diligence for out of it spring the issues of life." (Pro. 4:23)

"For as he thinks in his heart, so is he." (Pro. 23:7)

From these passages we learn that in order to be as God would have us to be we must learn to overcome sinful thought patterns. Understand that when we employ the term 'overcome' we do not mean sinless perfection, for this we will not have in the flesh. Rather we mean living a life of victory over sin.

One might ask at this point "if we are converted why do we still struggle?" While beyond the scope of this present article this is a question that deserves an answer, and we hope in the future to supply one. But for the time being, let it suffice to say that we do struggle, and it is due to the sin that remains in our humanness. We through Christ are saved from the penalty of sin, its dominating power and mastery. But we have not been delivered from its presence at all times and in all ways. One day we will be but not yet.

This is the reason that we are admonished to keep our hearts and to renew our minds. This is where the real fight is. The battle is between our remaining sin and us. We are new creatures who still are in our flesh in a fallen world. Here is the struggle and the battle rages in our minds.

Because of the above we have been told to be constantly putting to death the sin that is in our members. Note the following two passages.

"For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." (Rom. 8:13)

"Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth..." (Col. 3:5)

The Christian life involves mortifying sin by cultivating new habits of godliness. It also involves the elimination of the old sinful habits of the flesh. It is an ongoing process.

This is done as we renew our minds. The Bible teaches us that God has given His word so that we might do that very thing.

"How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed to your word." (Psa. 119:9)

Note the function of the word in Ephesians 5:25.

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word."

Did you catch it? Paul tells us that the process of sanctification (growing in Christ-likeness) is accomplished through being cleansed by the word. As we read the word and apply it to our life it washes our minds of the dirt and filth of the sin that is there.

This is paramount to winning the battle of sin in the mind. We must constantly study the word. We need to be in the word and to meditate upon it day and night. The more study you engage in the less impure and sinful thoughts you will have.

In addition to feeding on the word, one must also avoid the three ways that the mind engages in sin. While space does not allow for a thorough discussion of each point, noting them will be enough to help us get a grip on our thoughts.

The first way we sin with the mind is the sin of remembering the sins of the past in a fond way. Many times we find ourselves thinking upon some sinful pleasure of days gone by and thus we begin to cherish it in our heart. This cannot be done.

The second way is the sin of scheming. This is where we allow our lust to lead us into a fantasy world where plotting, planning for evil, premeditative acts and presumptuous sins occur.

The third way we sin with the mind is in our imagination. We often imagine vain and sinful things. We cannot dwell upon evil and entertain our minds with evil imaginations.

We hope that we have provided enough information to assist in getting a grip on our thought process. To properly deal with sins of the mind we must confess them by identifying them and forsake each. We must also feed on the Word which will prevent sin from taking root in our mind.

SAM DICK
Cave City, KY

GOSPEL MEETINGS

<u>DATES</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>SPEAKER</u>
Nov. 2 - 4 Friday and Saturday 7 P.M. Sunday at 10:00 A.M. and 5 P.M.	Jennings, FL South of Valdosta, Georgia.	Harry Cobb (Wedowee, AL)
Nov. 5 - 7	Owens Road Congregation Prattville, AL	Thad Eubank (Eubank, KY) & Joe Hill (Hager Hill, KY)

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. What did the Lord tell Moses the punishment was for working on the Sabbath?
2. What did Saul want to do with his son Jonathan, who had unknowingly violated Saul's order?
3. What was Nehemiah's job as a worker in the Persian palace?
4. Where did Philip begin a successful ministry, doing many miracles, and converting a former sorcerer named Simon?
5. What two people did Paul say he "delivered to Satan?"

ANSWERS NEXT MONTH . . .

and remember last month's questions?

1. What city was built by Omri, when he was king of Israel ?
SAMARIA (1 Kings 16:24)
2. What did the prophet Hosea say that the people asked
counsel from? THEIR WOODEN IDOLS (Hosea 4:12)
3. According to Mark's account, what did the disciples do on
the Sabbath that the Pharisees said was unlawful? PLUCKED
GRAIN IN THE FIELDS (Mark 2:23-28)

4. In Romans, Paul said he was from what tribe? THE TRIBE OF BENJAMIN (Romans 11:1)
5. What did James describe as "a fire, a world of iniquity?" THE TONGUE (James 3:6)