

Situational Ethics

Situation Ethics is defined as “A system of ethics (the rules or standards governing the conduct of the members of a profession) based on brotherly love in which acts are morally evaluated (judged) within a situational context (position with regard to surrounding conditions and attendant circumstances) rather than by application of moral absolutes” (AHD 1145). To put this idea into spiritual context we may paraphrase the definition to say, “A system of judging individual’s conduct not with the doctrine of Jesus Christ but according to the circumstances of their environment.”

There is no doubt that being around evil men at the job or experiencing extreme financial or health issues can be a more conducive environment to sin. The question we want to solve in this study is whether or not God takes into consideration the circumstances of my environment when He judges me. Is it alright for me to sin when my environment demands that I do so? Consider the following facts regarding sin and the answer to our question will be found.

What Does Sin Do?

Sin is lawless acts on the part of an individual (I Jn. 3:4). Consider the fact that God is just and righteous (Jer. 9:23ff). Secondly, God’s nature is light (justice and righteousness) and sin has no place with Him (I Jn. 1:5-7). Sin separates a man from God (Isa. 59:1-2; Ezek. 3:20-21). There are no degrees of sin in God’s word and neither is there an acceptable sin and an unacceptable sin. “*All unrighteousness is sin*” (I Jn. 5:17). The only sin that God will overlook is the sin I ask for forgiveness of (I Jn. 5:16-17). The standard that governs the individual’s conduct is the word of God. If that word is violated there is no justification on the part of man.

How should I view Sin?

I should abhor sin because it can cause me to loose my soul (Rom. 12:9). I should expose sin in others because it can cause them to loose their souls (Eph. 5:11). I should avoid sin because of its influencing effect (I Cor. 15:33).

Are there Bible Examples of Individuals whose Situation did not justify their sin?

Yes. The Hebrew Christians were persecuted being made a “*gazinstock both by reproaches and afflictions... and the spoiling of your possessions*” (Heb. 10:33ff). Did these trying times justify their sin? Consider the fact that the author of Hebrews tells the sinners that if they fall away from God’s grace through sin (because of persecution) then it will be impossible to renew them to repentance as they continue in their sin (Heb. 6:5-6). Consider the Galatians who had obeyed the gospel and were partakers of the

eternal inheritance yet because they allowed false teachers to sway them from the truth. Paul said, “*ye are severed from Christ, ye who would be justified by the law; ye are fallen away from grace*” (Gal. 5:4).

Concluding Thoughts

Some today try to use situational ethics to justify their sinful living. They tell us that they are a “product of their environment.” Still others blame their fathers and their mothers for their current sinful state. Rather than blaming self for their sin they blame the societies in which they are a part of and their parents. As long as one cannot see his or her personal responsibility regarding conduct they will generally continue on the path of sin. The solution to my sin is godly sorrow and repentance. I will not be able to stand before the Lord and request a jury that understands the times that I grew up in. I must stand before the Lord knowing that His word alone will be the “system of ethics” that judge me and no “situation” will change that (Jn. 12:48).