**Situation Ethics**

**Introduction:**

Do right and wrong depend upon the situation? Some people say “Yes”. Does the end justify the means? Again, some would say “Yes”. In the mid sixties Joseph Fletcher wrote a book titled Situation Ethics in which he set forth his belief that acts like lying, stealing, adultery can be good and acceptable. Unfortunately, that belief is practiced by many in our society including some religious people who claim that Jesus Himself taught this in Matthew 12:1-8. So, did Jesus’ disciples break the Law of Moses? Did Jesus defend and excuse the sins of the disciples? Can we set aside God’s law in an emergency situation? The only way to know the answers to these important questions is to examine God’s Word, especially our text in Matthew.

**Text:** Matthew 12:1-8

**Body:**

1. **The Meaning of the Passage**

* Verse 1: What the disciples did was lawful. (Deuteronomy 23:24-25) But they could not use a sickle to harvest or gather grapes to eat at a later time. Those acts of harvest would have been sinful. (See also Exodus 12:16)
* Verse 2: There were restrictions on what one could do on the Sabbath. The disciples did not go beyond those restrictions. The Pharisees had built up a whole body of traditions to which the disciples may have transgressed. (Matthew 15:1-9)
* Verses 3-4: Jesus responded by pointing out what David did while in exile. (I Samuel 21:1-6) David lied to the priest and tricked him into giving him the “holy bread” – the showbread that was only for the priests to eat. (Leviticus 24:5-9) David violated the Law of Moses and thus sinned. The Pharisees would never have condemned David who they held in high regard; but they condemned Jesus’ disciples who were totally innocent! No wonder Jesus called them hypocrites.
* Verse 5: The Sabbath law had recognized exceptions. The priests were an example. (Numbers 28:9-10) Even though the command was not to work on the Sabbath, their work was authorized. That’s why they were blameless. There were other activities allowed on the Sabbath as well: circumcision (John 7:22); caring for the needs of animals (Deuteronomy 22:1-4); (Matthew 12:11); and helping the needy (Luke 14:1-6). What the priests did on the Sabbath only appeared to violate the Sabbath law. In reality it did not.
* Verse 6: As the Son of God, Jesus was superior to the Levitical priests and His work was greater than theirs. Service to Him would, therefore, be greater than the service of the priests.
* Verse 7: Jesus revealed what the real problem was. He quoted Hosea 6:6 and said that the Pharisees didn’t apply this text as they should. Jehovah desired mercy with their sacrifice. Motive and attitude were just as important as the sacrifice. The Pharisees would obey some laws and neglect others. They were more concerned with their traditions than with their treatment of people. (Matthew 23:23-28)
* Verse 8: Jesus ended this discussion by asserting that He, as the Son of Man, made perfect application of the text. As Lord of the Sabbath, He knew exactly what the Sabbath law entailed.

**Conclusion:**

So we have seen that Jesus’ disciples did not break the Law of Moses nor does He allow God’s law to be set aside in an emergency situation. God’s laws are not optional!

Here are five questions to ask yourself whenever you are about to do something:

1. Is it according to the Word of God? (Matthew 4:4)
2. Does it violate any principle of Scripture? (Matthew 5:3, Mark 7:7)
3. Can I do it to the glory of God? (I Corinthians 10:31)
4. Can I ask God’s blessings upon it? (Colossians 3:17)
5. Would I like to be found doing this when Jesus comes? (Matthew 24:42-46)

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