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Is Lying Ever Moral?

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IS LYING EVER MORAL?

What does the story of Rahab say—or *not* say—about lying?

"Imagine yourself a Christian in Nazi Germany in the 1940s. Against the law, you've decided to give asylum in your home to an innocent Jewish family fleeing death. Without warning *gestapo* agents arrive at your door and confront you with a direct question: 'Are there any Jews on your premises?' What would you say? What would you do?"[1]

Thus begins a captivating but controversial editorial. "In Defense of Rahab" stirred up a passionate debate on the virtues and vices of lying to save life. Though some may feel that these issues have no relevance for life in the "real world," the magazine article rightly reminds us that they aren't merely theoretical.

Critical Biblical Principles

In 1997, one-third of adults in the United States believed that in contemporary society "'lying is sometimes necessary.'"[2] As a result of a nationwide survey, a well-respected researcher concluded that, "'America appears to be drowning in a sea of relativistic, nonbiblical theology. We are living amid the dilution of traditional, Bible-based Christian faith.'"[3] It is against this backdrop of living in a non-absolutist culture

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that the Scriptures portray a community of believers "who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (Rev. 14:12, NKJV). Therefore, if we are to ascertain accurately whether it is ever appropriate to lie to save life, it is absolutely imperative that a hermeneutically reliable investigation be done of this issue in the Bible.

Furthermore, though all doctrinal truths are to be found in Scripture, its central focus is Jesus Christ; for as He Himself noted, the Scriptures "'testify on my behalf'" (John 5:39, NRSV). Indeed, John the Beloved reminds us that the very reason he recorded the story of Jesus was so that "you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (20:31, NKJV). This is ultimately the central purpose of the entire Bible, including the narrative portions: to point to Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world and Lord of all life. Thus, only when all of Scripture is seen as focusing on the Savior can it be appropriately understood and correctly applied.

In almost every discussion of ethical issues the question of "legalism" is raised. In his theological treatise to the Christians in Rome, Paul categorically declares that human beings are "justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law" (Rom. 3:28, NKJV). Then, he asks: "Does this mean that we can forget about the law?" (vs. 31, NLT). Compellingly, Paul states, "Of course not! In fact, only when we have faith do we truly fulfill the law" (vs. 31, NLT).

This concept can be recognized from the way in which the Ten Commandments are articulated in Exodus. First, and foremost, God reminded His people: "'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery'" (Ex. 20:2, NIV). Only then, after God had established that it was He who had freed them from bondage, did He lay down His ethical expectations. Thus, God first redeems, then He requires; He saves people, then tells them how to serve Him and others. Clearly, this is not legalism. The one who has been delivered from sin will live in conformity with God's moral principles. As Jesus noted, "'If you love me, you will obey what I command'" (John 14:15, NIV). This precise sequence of love preceding obedience is already evident in the Decalogue itself, where God promises to show mercy to those "'who love me and keep my commandments'" (Ex. 20:6, NIV).

Before addressing truth-telling in exceptional situations, the issue of Scripture stories must be highlighted. Even a casual review of the Old and New Testaments reveals that the Bible does not in any way minimize human frailty. "Literary scholars have long noted the amazing transparency of biblical portraits. Samson's carnality, David's

lust, Solomon's political and religious compromise or Elijah's cowardice in running from Jezebel are all presented with remarkable forthrightness. . . . There was no attempt to hide the human frailty of biblical heroes."[4]

Though it's true that characters such as Elisha and Daniel model perseverance and faithfulness in the face of tremendous pressure, it is God's righteousness—not the humans'—that is highlighted. Rightly understood, Bible stories are to bring praise and honor to the God of the universe. In the reading and interpretation of the chronicles of the Word of God, it is God who is glorified, not faulty human beings. Thus, all deliberations on moral matters must be thoroughly Christ-centered, solidly Bible-based, and appropriately applied.

Analysis of Truth: The Spirit and the Specifics

Pontius Pilate asked the question: "What is truth?" (John 18:38, KJV). The tragic irony of this question was that Jesus Christ, "the truth" according to John 14:6, stood right in front of him, yet Pilate failed to recognize that. Moreover, the Holy Spirit, "the Spirit of truth" (14:17, KJV), was sent to this world to bear witness about Jesus Christ, the essence of all truth.

For God to lie would be against His very nature. To speak of the sanctity of truth, therefore, means to recognize the sanctity of the being of the Creator of the universe. Scripture describes the God of the universe as absolutely honest, totally trustworthy, and One in whom His created beings can have complete confidence.

But the Bible goes beyond that, teaching that God made humankind in His own image (Gen. 1:26-28), to reflect His character of truth and integrity (Matt. 5:16). Making this summons to veracity more specific, the Old Testament commands: "'Do not lie. Do not deceive one another'" (Lev. 19:11, NIV), and "Do not tell lies about others" (Ex. 20:16, CEV), for "The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in men who are truthful" (Prov. 12:22, NIV).

Correspondingly, the New Testament charges: "Each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor" (Eph. 4:25, NIV), "speaking the truth in love" (vs. 15, NKJV). It proclaims: "Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him" (Col. 3:9, 10, NASB). Plainly, this is the pivotal point: becoming trustworthy and truthful is possible only as we become more and more like Jesus Christ, One in whom there was no deceit (1 Peter 2:22).

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Spirit and not in oldness of the letter" (Rom. 7:6, NASB), some have suggested that at times the literal interpretation of the ninth commandment contradicts the broad principle of honesty, at which point the letter should be ignored while the spirit is to be kept. Careful study of this text indicates that it has been taken out of context, as the immediately following passage reveals: "What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, 'You shall not covet'" (vs. 7, NASB).

The context shows that though Paul is rejecting a merely external obedience, he is calling for a genuine Spirit-empowered allegiance to God's eternal law. This is similar to Jesus' condemnation of the proud religious leaders of His day: ""This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me"" (Mark 7:6, NKJV). Rather than nullifying obedience to God's specific moral requirements, Paul affirms that "The law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good" (Rom. 7:12, NKJV). Scripture does not pose an either/or choice between the principle and the particular; instead, it calls for "faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6, NKJV), "For the love of Christ compels us" (2 Cor. 5:14, NKJV).

"Everything that Christians do should be as transparent as the sunlight. Truth is of God; deception, in every one of its myriad forms, is of Satan; and whoever in any way departs from the straight line of truth is betraying himself into the power of the wicked one."[5]

Diligent investigation of the scriptural passages on lying and truth telling demonstrates that God has made truthful communication a binding moral obligation—so much so that "all liars [will meet their end] in the second death" (Rev. 21:8,

No Bible narrative should be followed uncritically. The actions of these characters must be checked against the prescriptive propositional statements made in other parts of Scripture. Only if and when their actions coincide with God's clearly revealed moral requirements, as in the Ten Commandments, and as exemplified in the life and teachings of Jesus, should they be emulated.

KJV). This is not simply an arbitrary decision of the God of truth and verity, but is the only reasonable solution, since "everyone who loves and practices falsehood" (Rev. 22:15, NIV) is in reality choosing to emulate Satan, "the father of lies" (John 8:44, NIV), while those who elect to follow Jesus, "the Truth," will inherit eternal life (John 3:16).

Yet, in human discourse, the question persists: What is the morally right thing to do, according to the Bible, when it seems that only falsehood will avert a fatality?

Deception or Death: A Challenging Choice

Some have asserted that unless the Bible expressly condemns a human behavior in a scriptural narrative, that behavior provides an example to follow under similar circumstances. They cite such passages as 1 Corinthians 10:11: "All these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition" (1 Cor. 10:11, NKJV).

Thus, it is concluded that stories such as those of Rahab, and of the Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, have been included in the Bible so that believers will know what to do in comparable situations, that lying to save life is legitimate—actually the morally right thing to do.

Are *all* the actions of Bible characters to be emulated? If not all, then should some actions be imitated? If so, which actions should be considered as models of morality? And, more importantly, how is a student of the Bible to know which actions to emulate and which to avoid?

What does 1 Corinthians 10:11 truly say about human behavior? This verse is in effect a summary of the preceding passage, in which Paul reminds the Corinthian Christians, "These things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted" (vs. 6, NKJV): idolatry and sexual

immorality (vss. 7, 8).

Thus, the immediate and broader contexts need to be taken into account to distinguish between what the Bible actually teaches and what it merely reports. Plainly, Scripture contains examples that should not be followed. Far from suggesting that the actions of Bible characters should be uncritically emulated, 1 Corinthians 10:11 is a summons to all believers to "avoid the evils recorded and imitate only the righteousness of those who served the Lord."[6]

Each scriptural narrative needs to be analyzed with regard to literary progression, dramatic structure, and stylistic features. Because narratives usually communicate ideas implicitly rather than explicitly, they are more needful of proper and careful interpretation.

Consider the tale of Tamar, widowed by a wicked husband (Gen. 38:7), abused by her second spouse (vss. 8-10), and defrauded by Judah, her father-in-law, out of marrying his third son (vss. 11-14). Taking matters into her own hands, she dresses like a prostitute to lure Judah into sex without recognizing her. She becomes pregnant. When it is revealed that the pregnancy was due to prostitution, Judah summarily sentences her to death. But just before the execution she exposes the father-to-be is Judah himself. Chagrined, Judah responds: "'She has been more righteous than I, because I did not give her to Shelah my son'" (vs. 26, NKJV). One of the twins born is named Perez, who becomes a direct ancestor of the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ.

What ethical implications are to be gleaned from this story, especially when it is recognized that not a single word of direct condemnation against Tamar can be found throughout the entire Bible? Does this narrative teach that incest is morally acceptable, since through this kind of action Tamar became one of Jesus' ancestors? Or is prostitution permissible at times, to bring about justice? Or does this narrative promote deceiving those who mistreat us, as Tamar did?

No Bible narrative should be followed uncritically. The actions of these characters must be checked against the prescriptive propositional statements made in other parts of Scripture. Only if and when their actions coincide with God's clearly revealed moral requirements as in the Ten Commandments, and as exemplified in the life and teachings of Jesus, should they be emulated. This is why Paul could say: "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1, NKJV).

Put plainly, Tamar's actions are explicitly condemned in Scripture because they violate specific divine moral laws that prohibit incest (Lev. 18:6-17; 20:11-21), prostitution (Lev. 19:29; 21:7; Deut. 23:17, 18),

and deception (Ex. 20:16; Lev. 19:11). The fact that Tamar is mentioned in the genealogical record of Jesus (Matt. 1:1-3), does not justify her immoral actions any more than does the listing of Judah promote deceit, prostitution, and a self-righteous, judgmental attitude.

Just as in the tale of Tamar, so in the record of Rahab, the conclusion is straightforward: Rahab deliberately used deception, but her action was a violation of God's law (Ex. 20:16; Lev. 19:11) and contrary to His character (Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29; Titus 1:2), as epitomized by Jesus our example, who never practiced deceit (1 Peter 2:21, 22).

Magnanimous Motives and Moral Action

What role, if any, do one's motives play in obedience? Careful study reveals at least three considerations:

1. Concerning the biblical definition of deception, there has been some debate as to the actual meaning of the ninth commandment: "'You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor'" (Ex. 20:16, NKJV). It has been stated that the language of this law "is clearly legal, forbidding malicious perjury."[7] Consequently, "this commandment by itself, strictly interpreted, hardly constitutes a prohibition of any and every kind of deception."[8]

Accordingly, at times deception of any kind has been promoted in order to preserve human life. While some modern linguists may endorse and promote this restricted view of the so-called literal meaning of the ninth commandment, it is profoundly more significant to determine how the divinely inspired Bible writers themselves understood and interpreted this moral requirement.

Though a superficial reading of Exodus 20:16 may appear to prohibit lying only in court, Leviticus 19 paints a much broader picture. Even a casual look at this legislation reveals that virtually every one of the Ten Commandments is reiterated, though in a different format. Verse 11, which contains both the eighth and the ninth commandments, uses an expression found throughout Old Testament writings that prohibits different types of deception and is not simply restricted to legal issues. This is the identical word found in the charges of law-breaking brought against the people of Israel by Hosea. It becomes evident that the divinely inspired Old Testament writers understood the ninth commandment to prohibit all kinds of deceit, not just perjury.

In the New Testament, Jesus responded to the rich young ruler's question as to which commandments he needed to observe: "'You shall not murder,'" "'You shall not

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commit adultery,'" "'You shall not steal,'" "'You shall not bear false witness'" (Matt. 19:18, NKJV). The Greek expression that means "bear false witness," or "give false testimony," is same used in the ninth commandment. This word is also used in Matthew 15:19, where Jesus comments: "'Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies'" (NKJV). When Mark records the same story in his Gospel account, he utilizes a different Greek expression that includes deception of every kind (Mark 7:22).

When Paul enumerates a catalog of vices in Romans 1:28-32, he uses the same word for deceit that Mark had chosen. This expression also appears in 1 Peter 2:22 to describe an evil trait of which Jesus was exempt. Thus, like their Old Testament counterparts, New Testament writers viewed the ninth commandment as including more than merely a prohibition against legal perjury.

Furthermore, examination of the ninth commandment, in its original setting in Exodus as well as in its multiple occurrences throughout Scripture, reveals that this ethical obligation is always stated without exceptions, exemptions, or reservation: "'You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor'" (Ex. 20:16, NKJV); "Do not lie to one another" (Col. 3:9, NKJV). None of the texts forbidding falsehood suggests that lying is justifiable or excusable.

Under divine inspiration, Bible writers of both Testaments understood the ninth commandment as forbidding all forms of falsehood, under all possible conditions, irrespective of projected consequences, and regardless of purportedly pure motives.

"False speaking in any matter, every attempt or purpose to deceive our neighbor, is here included. An intention to deceive is what constitutes falsehood. By a glance of the

Instead of adopting a fallacious, humanly formulated view of falsehood, it would be prudent and the only safe course for the committed Christian to embrace the divinely designed definition of deception, for only in so doing will there be opportunity for an accurate understanding and an appropriate application of God's royal law of liberty.

eye, a motion of the hand, an expression of the countenance, a falsehood may be told as effectually as by words. All intentional overstatement, every hint or insinuation calculated to convey an erroneous or exaggerated impression, even the statement of facts in such a manner as to mislead, is falsehood. This precept forbids every effort to injure our neighbor's reputation by misrepresentation or evil surmising, by slander or tale bearing. Even the intentional suppression of truth, by which injury may result to others, is a violation of the ninth commandment."[9]

And, according to Ellen White, this principle includes lying to save life: "Even life itself should not be purchased with the price of falsehood."[10] Hence, instead of adopting a fallacious, humanly formulated view of falsehood, it would be prudent and the only safe course for the committed Christian to embrace the divinely designed definition of deception, for only in so doing will there be opportunity for an accurate understanding and an appropriate application of God's royal law of liberty.

2. The novel concept that a lie is a false statement *with evil or selfish intent* does not correspond with the conventional, standard understanding of the word. Investigation of three major English dictionaries covering the last century,[11] reveals unanimity on this. Whether it be "deceit," "deceive," "falsehood," "lie," or "prevaricate," the same basic idea emerges: It is a deliberate distortion of the truth, by word or deed, with the objective of misleading.

Thus, there are two—and only two—essential elements in dictionary definitions pertaining to deception: (1) an action perverting the truth; and (2) an intentional aim to misinform. For at least the past century, there has never been even the remotest hint that a lie must be an intentional attempt to mislead *with evil intentions.* From a human

perspective, Christian behavior cannot be judged by intentions or by motive or consequence, but only by following principles that derive from God. Thus, it is best and most honest to utilize the conventional definition, which accords well with the true biblical meaning of these terms.

3. The idea of wicked or malicious or selfish intent implies, by contrast, that a false statement told with benevolent, altruistic, or compassionate motives is not a lie, even though its purpose is to deceive or mislead. If any of the other Ten Commandments is modified in this way, the results would be ludicrous and morally catastrophic.

For example, the eighth commandment would then read: "Stealing is to take another person's possessions with wicked or malicious or selfish intent, without his or her permission"; meaning, by contrast, that you may swipe someone's goods as long as it is done with noble motives! Or consider a similarly revised seventh commandment: "Adultery is when one is motivated by wicked or malicious or selfish desires to have sex outside of marriage"; meaning that extramarital sex is justifiable, if done lovingly, kindly, or magnanimously. Obviously, since the Decalogue simply calls for loving, loyal obedience to its absolute imperatives, irrespective of so-called virtuous motives, we need to observe them faithfully even "unto death" (Rev. 2:10, KJV).

Other subtly ambiguous descriptions are used to obscure the meaning of lying, for example, "diversionary tactic," "imaginative strategy," "playful trick," or "practical solution." Ellen White charges: "Call sin by its right name. Declare what God has said in regard to lying, Sabbathbreaking, stealing, idolatry, and every other evil."[12] Indeed, though there may be a tendency to euphemize expressions, "This is a time for Christians to stand tall for truth—in the midst of a forest of lies."[13]

Paul cautions: "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ" (Col. 2:8, NKJV). This is the choice: "human tradition" or "Christ." In Colossians 3:9, 10, Paul further stresses the vital necessity of a dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ as the key to the issue of truth-telling in any Christian's life. Similarly, recognizing that "it is not a light or an easy thing to speak the exact truth," Ellen White adds that "we cannot speak the truth unless our minds are continually guided by Him who is truth."[14] All must make a pivotal decision: Either we will choose to follow Satan, "the father of lies" (John 8:44, NASB), or we will elect to emulate Jesus Christ who declares of Himself: "'I am . . . the truth'"! (14:6, NIV).

Opposing Obligations or Compatible Commandments?

It appears that, up to the time of the Protestant Reformation, major Roman Catholic thought-leaders held that absolute moral commands sometimes come into unavoidable conflict. If there were no opportunity for avoiding one of two sins, the lesser evil should always be chosen. Until the beginning of the 20th century, most well-known Christian thinkers, in basic accord with the early Catholic perspective, believed that tragic circumstances of life at times force one into the position of having to choose between two moral evils.

Some have felt that this emphasis on ethical conflicts is misplaced. Yet they, too, must deal with the less-than-desirable borderline situations. Other thinkers have concluded that conflicting moral norms are impossible. Still others are firmly convinced of the reality of these situations of clashing ethical responsibilities. Over the years, this issue of the apparently inescapable choice between two or more moral evils has given rise to various methodologies for decision making.

Since the Bible does not explicitly address this matter, basic principles and relevant passages need to be carefully considered.

1. Comparing the Decalogue with the divine Lawgiver reveals that "the law of God, being a revelation of His will, [is] a transcript of His character."[15] Just as God is described as "holy" (Lev. 19:2; Josh. 24:19; Ps. 99:9, KJV), so the law is "holy" (Rom. 7:12, KJV). His character is "perfect" (Deut. 32:4, KJV), as is His moral law (Ps. 19:7, KJV). Just as He is "good" (25:8, KJV), so are His commandments (Rom. 7:12, KJV). Those who believe that divine moral absolutes conflict would in reality be pitting one aspect of God's nature against another. And if God's moral absolutes may at times conflict, then God's mind—and will—are conflicted. Since Scripture declares, however, that God's character is perfect and flawless, His moral laws will contain no conflicts or contradictions.

2. If genuine conflicts exist, in which one must choose a "lesser" moral evil, and if Christ "was in all points tempted as we are" (Heb. 4:15, NKJV), then He had to have sinned. Yet the rest of the passage just quoted categorically states that He was "without sin" (NKJV). Jesus' sinlessness is repeatedly noted (1 Peter 2:22; John 15:10), together with a summons to follow His example (1 Peter 2:21), which would be pointless if real moral dilemmas caused us to commit moral evil. Christ "came to demonstrate the fact that humanity, allied by living faith to divinity, can keep God's commandments."[16]

3. God created humans in the

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beginning as free moral beings (Gen. 2:15-17). One is never forced to obey or disobey God's moral law. Scripture teaches that individuals are always afforded a genuinely free moral choice (Deut. 30:19; Josh. 24:15; Matt. 11:28-30; 2 Cor. 6:2). "Man was created a free moral agent. . . . [H]e must be subjected to the test of obedience; but he is never brought into such a position that yielding to evil becomes a matter of necessity."[17] The notion that occasions arise in which the choices are only between one moral evil and another contradicts Scripture and supports Satan in his enmity against God's law.

4. Throughout the Scriptures, God is described as both able and willing to protect and provide for those who face tests (Ps. 46:1; 91:1-8; Dan. 3:16-18; Rom. 7:24, 25; Jude 24). The apostle Paul tells us that "God *is* faithful," and that He "will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able" (1 Cor. 10:13, NKJV). Concurring that "He lays on them no burden greater than they are able to bear,"[18] Ellen White says: "God has made ample provision for His people; and if they rely upon His strength, they will never become the sport of circumstances."[19] Moreover, "God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him" (Phil. 2:13, NLT). In other words: "Whatever is to be done at His command may be accomplished in His strength. All His biddings are enablings."[20] The fact that a trustworthy God has promised to keep His followers from falling and to provide a morally right way of escape when trials come confirms that they will never be forced to choose between two evils.

5. The New Testament frequently mentions the final judgment that takes place before Christ's second coming (Matt. 12:36, 37; Acts 24:25). Accentuating the importance of God's moral norms, the writer of Ecclesiastes concludes: "Fear God and

Scripture records that, "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9, NKJV). This offer of forgiveness, however, does not negate that such action is classified as sin. On the contrary, the fact that it must be confessed proves that it is a moral evil.

keep His commandments; for that is the whole duty of everyone. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil" (Eccl. 12:13, 14, NRSV). After enumerating specific Decalogue commandments, so that it's clear what "law" James is referring to, he says: "So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty" (James 2:12, NKJV). "In order to be prepared for the judgment, it is necessary that men should keep the law of God. The law will be the standard of character in the Judgment."[21] Obviously a fair final judgment is possible only if there is a clear moral standard that human beings can always obey through the power of God.

6. James emphasizes the wholistic nature of the divine moral law as follows: "Whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10, NKJV). From God's perspective, there is no such thing as a lesser moral evil that He will merely disregard, for the transgression of any of His commandments is sin (1 John 3:4). "In order to be a commandment breaker it is not necessary that we should trample upon the whole moral code. If one precept is disregarded, we are transgressors of the sacred law."[22]

But Scripture records that, "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9, NKJV). This offer of forgiveness, however, does not negate that such action is classified as sin. On the contrary, the fact that it must be confessed proves that it is a moral evil. Recognizing that the Bible discounts the concept of a so-called permissible lesser evil, it becomes clear that "God requires of all His subjects obedience, entire obedience to all His commandments."[23]

7. Last, yet most critically, the theme of the cosmic controversy between good and evil needs to be thoughtfully considered. The first three chapters of Genesis indicate that the Tempter set out to lure Eve

into doubting, questioning, and eventually challenging God's veracity as well as the justice and fairness of His moral requirements (Gen. 3:1-6). "From the first, the great controversy had been upon the law of God. Satan had sought to prove that God was unjust, and that His law was faulty, and that the good of the universe required it to be changed."[24]

Further light on this cosmic battle emerges from the first two chapters of the Book of Job. Satan set out to prove that if God removed His protective care from Job, loyalty to God and obedience to His law would collapse (Job 1:7-12). "Satan had claimed that it was impossible for man to obey God's commandments; and in our own strength it is true that we cannot obey them. But Christ came in the form of humanity, and by His perfect obedience He proved that humanity and divinity combined can obey every one of God's precepts."[25] This corresponds with God's injunction regarding the Decalogue: "'Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!'" (Deut. 5:29, NKJV). Since God requires people always to obey all His moral laws, and since God gave no commandments that cannot be obeyed by all, there is never a time when one is compelled to choose between two moral evils. It is Satan who claims that on occasion God's moral law cannot be obeyed.

Fear of the Future or Faith in the Father?

It has been suggested that Rahab's deception was justifiable, for without it the spies would certainly have been captured or killed, resulting in disaster for the Israelites. This type of logic contradicts Romans 3:8, which warns against doing evil "'that good may result'" (NIV). It was at God's direct command that the Israelites were to cross the Jordan River, "'to the land which I am giving to them—the children of Israel'" (Josh. 1:2, NKJV). Thus, adopting an atheistic approach of totally ignoring God's pivotal role in the lives of His people, the Rahab incident has been approached from a thoroughly humanistic perspective.

It seems that the natural human reaction, when confronted with perplexing ethical difficulties or life-or-death dilemmas, is to attempt to project the future, and then to make decisions based on these consequential speculations. The person who has become "a new creation" in Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:17, NKJV), however, is called upon to no longer "be conformed to this world" but to have a "transformed" way of thinking (Rom. 12:2, NKJV), and to "walk in the newness of life" (6:4, NKJV), "according to the Spirit" (8:4, NKJV). What this means in concrete situa-

tions is spelled out explicitly in instructions given by Jesus Christ: "'Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. . . . Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life'" (Rev. 2:10, NKJV). The challenge is: Do not operate out of fear of the future, but by faith in the Father!

This conspicuous contrast between fear and faith surfaces in the account of the storm on the Sea of Galilee. After Jesus had miraculously silenced the turbulent ocean, He asked His disciples: "'Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?'" (Mark 4:40, NKJV).

The reaction of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, when faced with either the fiery furnace or forsaking their heavenly Father, exhibits precisely the opposite reaction. Though they believed that God was able to deliver them from death, they said to Nebuchadnezzar: "'But even if he does not, . . . we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up'" (Dan. 3:18, NIV). "True Christian principle will not stop to weigh consequences."[26]

How, then, should moral decisions be made? "In deciding upon any course of action we are not to ask whether we can see that harm will result from it, but whether it is in keeping with the will of God."[27] Admittedly, statements such as these run counter to a culturally conditioned, results-oriented, rationalistic mind. As one scholar astutely noted: "We want to be like the most High, subject to none. But can we calculate the eternal results or the rightness of our actions? We cannot predict even the next five minutes, much less the future."[28] When the biblical truth is acknowledged that only the Creator can "tell . . . the future before it even happens" (Isa. 46:10 NLT), people will begin to spurn speculating about possible consequences and embrace the challenge of living for God's glory, in complete conformity to His commandments.

Since consequential reasoning proves to be a "hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ" (Col. 2:8, NIV), it needs to be roundly rejected. Instead, just as Jesus was "obedient to the point of death" (Phil. 2:8, NASB), regardless of consequences, the dedicated believer is challenged to "have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had" (vs. 5, NLT), fearless of the future, but "'be faithful until death'" (Rev. 2:10, NASB). □

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[4] Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical*

Since consequential reasoning proves to be a "hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ" (Col. 2:8, NIV), it needs to be roundly rejected. Instead, just as Jesus was "obedient to the point of death" (Phil. 2:8, NASB), regardless of consequences, the dedicated believer is challenged to "have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had."

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[26] *The Sanctified Life*, p. 39.

[27] *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 634.

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