

## The Puritans and Situation Ethics

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*[The text for this lecture is available on the Trinity Foundation website. Only the questions following the lecture are here transcribed.]*

Question: ???

I think the difficulty involved is not to be solved the way Fletcher attempts to solve it, but rather it is a matter of exegeting Scripture and finding out what these laws imply. I referred yesterday, for some reason or other, and did I do it in this lecture, I forget, *The Heart of Midlothian*. Now this is a situation where a young woman was brought to court and charged with murder. And she had an, a guess it was her aunt, and these were both Covenanters, and they had a very strong sense of truth. And she was put on the stand and she knew quite well that she and she alone could condemn this person to capital punishment. She was the other one who had the evidence. And she was put under oath. And according to her Calvinistic conscience she told the truth, and the girl was condemned to death. Then she walked, very poor woman, she walked all the way from Edinburgh to London and besought the Earl of Argyle for a pardon for this niece of hers. I think it was a niece. And she was successful so the story in that part comes out happily.

Now there is another way of solving this problem and it is a difficulty in Biblical interpretation. You remember that when Saul asked Samuel what he was doing, he didn't say he had come there to anoint David king. What he said was undoubtedly the truth, but it was said in order to deceive Saul. And so there may be some Biblical basis for deceiving people on occasion. Now I do not say this is situational ethics. That's defined in a different way. It is a matter of interpreting the Scripture.

Now, this of course has come up very sharply in time of war. If the Nazi's would come into Holland and say "are you hiding a Jew in your home?" You say yes, well that's the end of the Jew. And maybe you should be brilliant enough to say something irrelevant and throw them off. But I think this is a matter of interpreting when deception is permitted. Now, if anyone is shocked at the idea of permitting deception, certainly no one is shocked by the fact we do not call killing in war murder. Wars are very unfortunate things, but God commanded wars. He didn't merely permit them, he commanded them. And in this case, killing the enemy is part of the business. And I would suppose that deception would also be part of the business in such a situation. Now I use the word *situation* on purpose here, but I do not think that I am advocating situation ethics. I am trying to interpret the Scripture. This can lead to some very difficult questions. And if anyone else in the room would like to get up and give a defense of his position, I'd be very glad to listen to it.

Question: ????

Well, I use the case of Samuel because I thought it was a better case. In the case of Ai, it was a battle you see, and strategy or tactics in battle is a regular thing. And so I chose an example where you would not have the excuse of war. That is I chose the most strenuous case I could think of at the moment.

Question: ??? Rahab ???

Oh yes. Well, in principle that is the same as Samuel. The question of Rahab was asked, as this would also be the same as undoubtedly happened many times when the Nazi's would come and search places and ask who was there and so on. Of course there is some other complications in the case of Rahab. I guess we are supposed, we are allowed to believe that Rahab at that time was not a worshipper of Jehovah. That she acted through her pagan principles and she lied and possibly later on she repented of all her sins. Rahab of course was a pagan at the time. Somehow she had a notion that the Israelites were going to conquer. What her religious motives were in this I don't know. I'm not sure whether she had any or not. Once again, I tried to take the case of Samuel because it didn't have these additional things to it. We have a clearer case because Samuel was not a pagan.

Question: ???

Yes, and in the case of Abraham isn't there an explicit condemnation of his procedure? Or is there? At any rate it doesn't seem to be approved.

Question: ???

Her faith, yeah.

Question: ???

What is the general idea? People would be glad to know it.

Question: ???

*[recording end]*