

Ephesian Lesson 9 Article

In our own generation, we have witnessed the advancement in both the secular culture and the Christian church of what has been called ‘the New Morality’. Joseph Fletcher’s book called *Situation Ethics* became a best-seller in the 1960s, and it was linked, at points, with the emergence of the so-called New Morality. The ‘situational ethics’ thesis was this: the Christian faith is not based chiefly on a list of rules, commandments, and laws. There is only one moral imperative, only one overarching law, to be found in the Christian life. It is the law of love: to love God and do what love requires in any given situation.

Fletcher appealed to Pauline statements such as, ‘love is the fulfillment of the law’ (Romans 13:10). The famous quotation of Augustine, ‘Love God and do as you please’, was twisted beyond any recognition from its original intent. Augustine meant that if our hearts are motivated internally by the proper spirit of love for God, then we will be able to do as we please because love for God will constrain us to do only those things that please the Lord. That is, the supreme motivation for obeying the law of God both in its letter and its spirit, is a genuine affection for the Father. But Augustine never had in mind the idea that if you have some feeling of affection for God in your heart, then you can go ahead and disregard the commandments of God.

Of course, Fletcher doesn’t say it that crassly either. But he does allow that there may be situations where, for example, if the overarching consideration is love, extra-marital sexual relationships may be quite acceptable in the sight of God. There are various studies on human sexuality produced by commissions and committees of mainline denominations which have set forth the possibility that within the context of love, it may be all right to be engaged in extra-marital sexual relationships, premarital sexual involvement, and even homosexual relationships. The idea, at the bottom line, is this: if you love, then your behavior can be determined, circumscribed and justified by that love.

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people (verse 3). Here we see the sharp contrast between Paul’s understanding of what it means to live a life of love, and the contemporary cultural understanding of what it means. In Paul’s mind nothing could be further from a life of love than to be involved in sexual relationships that are forbidden by God.

Paul doesn’t say, ‘Love God and do as you please.’ But he says, ‘If you want to know what love demands, then pay attention to what the prime source of love requires. God’s law reveals to us what is pleasing to him.’ The point of this passage is that, if we are his children and we want to imitate him, we must seek to obey his laws. This is not to be done slavishly, out of servile fear or out of some rigid, stoical desire for rule-keeping, but rather from a profound desire to express our love for the Father.¹

There is a pernicious doctrine in the evangelical church in our day which says that all a person has to do to be redeemed is to accept Jesus as Saviour; he doesn’t have to receive him as Lord. This dichotomy between Saviour and Lord is the clearest, most blatant form of Antinomianism seen in the twentieth century. The moment we are regenerated, the Spirit of God comes to dwell in our hearts to motivate us, to give us an obedient heart. Now we love the law of God, not because it is the means by which we are redeemed, but because it reveals to us what pleases our Father whom we love. The moment we embrace Jesus as Saviour, we bow to him as Lord, and seek to show our love for him by obeying his commandments.²

¹ Sproul, R. C. (1994). *The Purpose of God: Ephesians* (121–123; 124–125). Scotland: Christian Focus Publications.