

Moral Obligations

What are we to do?

We have an obligation to do *everything* in a way that honors God. *To not do so is sin*. This obligation applies even to the "mundane" things we do, such as eating and drinking (1 Corinthians 10:31). Because of this, everything in life falls into one of the following categories:

Priority Level	Obligation	When does it apply?	How does it apply?
#1	Love for God	Always, under all circumstances	The same obligations apply to all
#2	Love for neighbor	Always, unless it violates #1	The same obligations apply to all
#3	"Other"	Free to choose, unless influenced by other obligations	Different for each person
(x)	Sin	Never, under any circumstance	The same obligations apply to all

- If it doesn't seem natural for you to include God and his values in all your choices, it's because you have spent most of your lifetime *not* including him. It won't become natural until you've made a conscious effort to change - just like any other time you try to change the way you've learned to respond to something.

Things to consider:

1. Everything you do is a reflection of values. Whose values do you reflect in your life? (God's values, or someone else's values?)
2. What you do, and what you *don't* do, are both factors, and both will influence whether your actions are righteous or sinful.
3. Nothing is totally "neutral." Even when we are free to choose more than one way, our choice is important, for it occurs within the context of the rest of life. At the Day of Justice, everything we do will be evaluated as either "good" or "evil," not "neutral."

More about the "Other" category

1. This category includes:
 - choices which are merely a matter of personal preference
 - religious and ceremonial activities
 - any *legitimate* form of self love
 - love for the things of creation
 - anything else that doesn't fall into another category
2. This is the category where "free choices" exist. Yet the activities and choices in this category will *often* be influenced by higher priorities, and those higher priorities will determine the way we must respond.
3. In this category, what is right for one person may be wrong for another, since different people find themselves in different circumstances. This rightness or wrongness will not be based on *subjective* "feelings" or on one's desire to do as he pleases, but on the *objective* relationship of that choice to other priorities and obligations. People often fall into sin, when they become so preoccupied with what they call "freedom to choose," that they overlook higher priorities and more important obligations that are connected with those "free" choices they are making.
4. In matters of genuine freedom, we have no right to push our views on others. But we *do* have a right to restrain the use of our freedom, out of love for others.
5. Choices in this category can become *mandatory* for an individual - such as when a promise to do them has been made, or when the choice has become inseparably connected with an expression of love for God or neighbor. They can become *prohibited* for an individual - such as when a promise to *not* do them has been made, or when the choice has become inseparably connected with sin.
6. Never forget that this category includes religious activities. God makes a clear distinction between "religion" and "love for God." People have a tendency to blur this distinction, to think that religious activities are what matters, and to exalt them above love for God and neighbor. In reality, such activities may be mandatory, optional, unnecessary, or even forbidden, depending on the circumstances and context. (Example: Changes in circumstances and context are the part of the reason why Old Testament religious ceremonies don't apply to us, today.)

What if there seems to be a conflict between two priorities?

There would have been no reason for conflicts to exist, until sin entered the world. But now, since they sometimes *do* occur, we need to learn how to respond.

We must first make sure that we haven't simply misunderstood the issue at hand. If we have, then we can re-evaluate the situation and go on from there. But if we discover that there *is* a genuine conflict, the way we respond would depend on the nature of the conflict:

1. If it involves two obviously *different* priority levels, we should focus on the higher priority.
2. If it involves two obligations on the *same* level, we need to examine the issue further. Quite often, there will be a higher priority obligation that we have overlooked. In this case, we should focus on the higher priority.
 - The higher priority may even change the significance of the lower priority obligations.
 - This doesn't apply to "Level 1" priorities. They *never* contradict, and *there are no higher priorities*.
3. There may be times in which we (or someone else) may have created the conflict, through wrong choices already made. If sin has caused the conflict, there may be no good alternative, and *any* choice may result in problems. Focus on the higher priorities that may exist, and try to minimize the damage. But realize that there may be unavoidable bad consequences from past choices. If applicable, repent of any sins that may have lead to the conflict, so that future conflicts may be minimized.

People who promote "situation ethics" will invent scenarios that are designed to confuse others into believing that conflicts actually exist, when they don't. They often ignore the fact that obligations to God take precedence over all other obligations - they may even deny the existence of such obligations - and then design a supposed "moral dilemma" that reflects their view. Their scenario may also include false assumptions about the relationships between various moral issues (such as the assumption that love and hate are *always* incompatible opposites, when Scripture says otherwise).

Is sin *ever* a good option?

NO! Sin is *always* sinful and evil. There will *never* be an instance in which sin is good.

1. God may use a person's sin to *indirectly* accomplish something good, but it is God's accomplishment, not the sin, that is good. The sin still remains sinful and evil.
2. What about scenarios that are sometimes used to "prove" that sin can be good? Most tend to be based on a false perception of the issues and values involved. Sometimes, the supposed scenario will exist only because other sins (not mentioned in the scenario) have *already* been committed. Often, the apparent "goodness" of the sin is due to incomplete or distorted information that masks its evil nature.