



International Fellowship of Christian Businessmen

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Round Table Topic

Situational Ethics

by Os Hillman

Lord, who may dwell in Your sanctuary? Who may live on Your holy hill? He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart. - Psalm 15:1-2

"I cannot believe they are not going to honor my bonus agreement," said the executive who was about to take another position in a new city. Her understanding of her present work agreement called for a bonus at the end of the year. Management saw the situation differently. "It's not right. I am entitled to that bonus," she complained.

It was time to leave. The company had given her a laptop to use. However, when she left, she decided that because the company was not going to pay her the bonus she was entitled to, she would simply keep the laptop as compensation due her. "And they would never miss it," she reasoned. She was now in the employment of the new company. As each day passed, she grew uneasy about her decision. She could not get it off her mind. Finally, she concluded that the Holy Spirit was telling her this decision was wrong and that she needed to call her former boss to confess her action. She called him and confessed what she had done and why she had done it. Her boss accepted her confession and forgave her. Strangely enough, he allowed her to keep the laptop computer.

Truth never changes. It is absolute. When we make decisions based on other actions that are taken, we move into making decisions based on the situation, not truth and righteousness. The executive may indeed have been wronged, but she had to address the wrong in the appropriate way. Trying to compensate for the wrong by doing something that violates another scriptural principle is called situational ethics. If the employer had never wronged the executive, do you think she would have felt justified in taking the computer? Probably not. When you isolate the two situations, you see that one action was taken in response to the other action.

Have you had any experiences in which you have used situational ethics? The Lord desires His people to have a higher standard, even at the cost of being wronged. Ask the Lord to reveal any business practices that may indicate situational ethics. You might be surprised what will happen when you do the right thing.