

# Is All Fair In Love And War?

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We have often heard the cliché, "All is fair in love and war," implying that people can suspend the law or the rules in special circumstances. Without verbalizing it, people believe the law of expediency rather than God's moral law becomes a governing authority in such instances. They use excuses like, "It was an emergency," or "I had no other choice," to justify their actions.

In times of transition or change, when the regular routines have been altered, people find it enticing to adopt an "anything goes" or "take the law into our own hands" attitude. This is reminiscent of the deplorable condition described at the conclusion of Judges: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25).

## Times of Instability

The world has just come through the pre- and post-Y2K trauma, having contemplated stark catastrophic visions of civil disasters brought about by computer glitches. Hucksters and panderers, attempting to profit from people's fears and anxieties, greatly exacerbated both legitimate and exaggerated concerns. Some of these "brokers of misery" actually seemed to welcome disaster, seeing it as an opportunity to enrich or empower themselves at the expense of peoples' gullible apprehensions.

God's Word warns us not to desire or look forward to times of destabilization, or worse yet, to become a catalyst in bringing it about. Proverbs 24:21-22 warns, "My son, fear the LORD and the king; do not associate with those given to change; for their calamity will rise suddenly, and who knows the ruin those two [the LORD and the king] can bring?" The second half of Proverbs 17:5 reinforces this warning: "He who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished," suggesting that God will do the punishing.

Regarding the calamitous and tumultuous events at the close of the age, Amos 5:18 warns, "Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD! For what good is the day of the LORD to you? It will be darkness, and not light." Without the stabilizing influence of God's Holy Spirit, the carnal mind actually takes delight in the gray areas of instability, finding excuses to suspend the law or bend the rules. Even well-meaning Christians sometimes use the "ox in the ditch" escape clause to defile God's Sabbath command (see Luke 14:5). On occasion, they may deliberately push the ox into the ditch to take advantage of the emergency.

People erroneously believe that in a climate of lawlessness, morality and righteousness can be suspended for expedience. Paul addresses this misguided mindset in Romans 5:13, "For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law." The apostle makes it clear in the next verse that sinning in the "absence of law" brings about the same penalty as sinning with full knowledge of the law: "Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam." The offense committed in ignorance or in willful ignorance is just as abominable as one done with knowledge.

"Extenuating circumstances" provide golden opportunities to suspend God's moral law, or so people reason. People who normally appear to behave lawfully become transformed into thieves during natural disasters such as floods, hurricanes, tornadoes or earthquakes. Police and National Guard units have a full-time job preventing looting.

During the Sixties, television cameras recorded the behavior of certain residents of Watts and Detroit, who, while seeing themselves as "victims," nevertheless helped themselves to the loot and plunder of the vandalized stores. It is almost axiomatic that when a building or vehicle has been abandoned, vandals rush in like a hoard of hungry cockroaches to dismantle, destroy and defile these "discarded" items with graffiti. Some homeowners who have been forced to relocate temporarily spend elaborate sums to create the illusion that their vacant dwellings are inhabited.

### **Double Standards**

God Almighty makes it abundantly clear in His Word that He hates double standards, one set for one person and one set for another, or one set for one group of people and another set for another group. God says through Moses, "One law and one custom shall be for you and for the stranger who dwells with you" (Numbers 15:16). This applies in business practices as well: "Diverse weights and diverse measures, they are both alike, an abomination to the LORD" (Proverbs 20:10).

Yet, because of the poor quality of teaching-learning interaction in many inner-city schools, the federal government has pushed a collection of programs euphemistically called Affirmative Action (or as a colleague has quipped, "Affirmative Apartheid"). A result of this program is that through mandatory quotas it has inadvertently "dumbed down" entrance requirements to compensate for the poor quality of education given in the vital formative years of certain individuals.

Attempting to fix the symptom while ignoring the cause, well-meaning, but misguided lawmakers have set aside achievement, merit and high standards in favor of arbitrary quotas. In his article, "Even liberals admit affirmative action failure," Steven Hayward suggests that the pioneers in the civil rights movement found the idea of handicaps and quick-fix quotas abhorrent. He cites Frederick Douglas, who wrote in 1871, "Equality in numbers has nothing to do with equality of attainment." An NAACP official, Jack Greenberg, said in the 1950s, "The chief problem with quotas is that they introduce a potentially *retrogressive* concept into the cherished notion of individual equality."

Nevertheless, according to Hayward, the color-blind principle of "equal opportunity" lost out to the opportunism of quick-fix quotas. Suspending standards for expedience sake has reaped a harvest of bitter fruit. *Washington Post* columnist William Raspberry states that people benefiting from federal assistance programs of any kind—whether affirmative action price supports, federally assisted housing, welfare or food stamps—begin to hate these programs intensely because they incrementally rob people of their dignity and self-respect. In the words of Raspberry, "The only qualification for them is to be a failure."

Echoing this sentiment, Michael Tanner, Director of Health and Welfare Studies at the Cato Institute, in his executive summary, "Ending Welfare As We Know It," describes the welfare system as a colossal failure:

Our welfare system is unfair to everyone: to taxpayers, who must pick up the bill for failed programs; to society, whose mediating institutions of community, church, and

family are increasingly pushed aside; and most of all to the poor themselves, who are trapped in a system that destroys opportunity for them and hope for their children.

### **Extenuating Circumstances**

Extenuating circumstances and crises have been used as excuses for bypassing not only God's laws but man's law as well. President Bill Clinton's series of executive orders, beginning with the "don't ask, don't tell" policy served to bypass or circumvent the prescribed lawmaking path prescribed by the Constitution, replacing it with expedient solutions which transgress God's and man's laws alike.

Sadly, every one of God's commandments has been "suspended" by "extenuating circumstances." Adultery and fornication, normally wrong, become tolerated in moments of weakness at a New Year's or Mardi Gras celebration. Coveting, normally wrong, becomes tolerated when one is poor. A favorite and perennial political ploy of one major political party is to exploit class envy. Murder, normally wrong, becomes justified by reason of insanity; stealing, normally wrong, becomes justified by poverty and legitimized by bankruptcy laws.

Certain members of the United States Congress and Senate have even gone on record as declaring that bearing false witness is acceptable as long as it is about adultery. Certain members of our previous fellowship suspended the Sabbath commandment, insisting that setting aside holy time is a "matter of personal choice." The prohibition against idolatry has been temporarily suspended by certain individuals in the greater church of God who have arrogated to themselves titles of aplomb that they would have shuddered in terror to do so ten short years ago.

God's Word thunders a profound warning against those who recklessly arrogate to themselves authority and privileges He did not give them. Jeremiah 23:31-32 says, "'Behold, I am against the prophets,' says the LORD, 'who use their tongues and say, "He says." . . . Yet I did not send them or command them; therefore they shall not profit this people at all,' says the LORD ."

### **Saul's Great Sin**

During a time of scattering, King Saul became impatient for things to happen and decided to take matters into his own hands.

Then he waited seven days, according to the time set by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him. So Saul said, "Bring a burnt offering and peace offerings here to me." And he offered the burnt offering. Now it happened, as soon as he had finished offering the burnt offering, that Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might greet him. And Samuel said, "What have you done?" And Saul said, "When I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered together at Michmash, then I said, 'The Philistines will now come down on me at Gilgal, and I have not made supplication to the LORD.' Therefore I felt compelled, and offered a burnt offering." And Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you. For now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you." (1 Samuel 13:8-14)

By reacting to extenuating circumstances and yielding to the will of the people, Saul found an expedient excuse for suspending the law of God. While reiterating God's rejection of him as king, Samuel reminds him, "When you were little in your own eyes, were you not head of the tribes of Israel? And did not the LORD anoint you king over Israel? . . . Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD?" (I Samuel 15:17, 19).

Saul failed to realize that submission to God's will is not conditional but *continual*. Situations or circumstances, no matter how compelling, do not put us outside of or above the law. "To obey," says Samuel, "is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams" (I Samuel 15:22). Certainly, to obey is preferable to making excuses or justifications. Samuel continues his admonishment in verse 15, "For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry."

### **David, Too**

Saul's successor, David, a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22), found out he, too, was not above the law and that "all is not fair in love and war." David's adulterous affair with Bathsheba and arranging the murder of Uriah did not take place without consequences. Though David repented and sought God's mercy, the penalty was still visited upon him and the nation of Israel (II Samuel 12:9-19).

Somewhat later, he committed another sin of expedience. As military preparedness seemed to dictate a counting of heads, David ordered Joab to number the people. Though God nowhere prohibits taking a census, II Samuel 24:10 and I Chronicles 21:7-8 both plainly state that David's count of Israel was a sin. Like Saul, David's sin lies in selfishly and arrogantly doing something God had not given him to do. His actions brought a terrible penalty upon all Israel (II Samuel 24:15).

Do we think we are any more secure than the man after God's own heart? Have times really changed so much since Saul's or David's times? God still favors "him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word" (Isaiah 66:2). Paul commands us to "[bring] every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (II Corinthians 10:5). He later writes that Christ "became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him" (Hebrews 5:9).

Obedience to God's commandments is certainly still required of us, and just because times have changed or we are in a temporary bind, we have no right to put God's law aside. In fact, it is during such times that we should dedicate ourselves to live God's way of life with greater precision and zeal. The psalmist writes:

Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and Your law is truth. Trouble and anguish have overtaken me, yet Your commandments are my delights. The righteousness of Your testimonies is everlasting; give me understanding, and I shall live. (Psalm 119: 142-144)

Even though love and war often seem to require playing outside the bounds of what is normally considered good behavior, we have been called to a higher standard. Love and war are certainly not fair, but the God who perfectly balances justice and mercy is fair, and it is to Him "we must give account" (Hebrews 4:13).