

# Sin ALWAYS Hurts Someone

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In the “situation ethics” framework of morality, people try to determine right and wrong by the effect of a behavior upon others. If an act is harmful, then that act is (sometimes) declared wrong. On the other hand, a perceived benefit makes the act acceptable.

Ellen Goodman, for example, uses this reasoning in a recent article defending homosexual adoption (AJC, 3/27/06). Goodman cites a study that “shows *again* that children of gay parents do fine.” She lauds adoption agencies that accept gay applicants: they “want only one thing: to find safe, good homes in a country with 500,000 children adrift.” Not only is this “the end justifies the means,” she insinuates that without gay adoption abandoned children will remain homeless.

To bolster her (unbiased?) argument, Goodman injects the personal situation of her young cousin Ruthie who has been adopted by two gay men. Ruthie, she says, leaves “her parents joyously breathless” and her toddler cousins “take for granted” that she has two fathers. And, “Did I mention that Ruthie’s birth mother chose this couple to raise her, picking these two men from all the dossiers at the adoption agency?” This shallow, pragmatic approach is as far as Ellen Goodman’s thinking goes. Unfortunately, this is as far as the thinking of many others goes as well.

There is absolutely no spiritual dimension to this reasoning. There can be no “judgment” about the sinfulness of an act or relationship. There is no concern for the spiritual nurture of a child raised in a relationship that is ungodly and immoral on the face of it. Ms. Goodman assesses the situation from a purely secular point of view and declares little Ruthie, and all others like her, blessed. In her words,

“Ruthie is why I take it personally when the Vatican calls gay adoptions ‘gravely immoral.’”

Some problems with this kind of “values thinking”:

- 1) Sinful behavior *always* hurts the sinner because it results in separation from God, a condition called “death” (Rom 6:23). The deception is that spiritual death is not detected by the senses; we “feel” alive (except for that nagging conscience) and do not understand the fatal condition that afflicts our soul.
- 2) Sinful behavior *always* hurts the sinner because it mars the divine image in which we have been made; it conditions us to further ungodliness; and it darkens the sinner’s view of himself and others. Again, these are effects that are often not obvious; they must be understood by self-examination in light of God’s revelation concerning sin.
- 3) Sinful behavior *always* hurts those who are taught that such is “normal” or acceptable. They will either lose their abhorrence for it or find it difficult to overcome if they later decide to pursue a life of godliness. It is not enough to look at young children playing happily in the presence of adoptive homosexual parents and conclude that they are “fine.” Fine in relation *to what*??

Like the disoriented pilot, we often *feel* rightside-up when we are upside-down. We must learn to “fly by instruments”; i.e., concentrate on the objective markers that God has carefully placed to guide us. Even those of faith can buy into the “it won’t hurt anyone” rationalization. And sin goes on devastating lives as we continue to congratulate ourselves for our open-mindedness.