

Non-Conflict Absolutism:

Anabaptist Tradition (notable proponents include John Murray & Walter Kaiser)

1. God's unchanging standard is the basis of moral absolutes
2. God has expressed his unchanging moral character in his law.
3. God cannot contradict Himself.
- 4 Thus, no two absolute moral laws can really conflict.
5. All moral conflicts are only apparent, not real.

All moral conflicts are only apparent; they are not real. In other words, sins is always avoidable. There are no exceptions or exemptions.

Conflict Absolutism:

Lutheran Tradition (notable proponents include Helmut Thielicke & Robert Lightner)

1. God's law is absolute and unbreakable.
2. There are unavoidable conflicts between God's commands in a fallen world.
3. When moral conflicts happen, we should do the lesser evil. The wicked world is far from being ideal.
4. Forgiveness is available if we confess our sins (1 John 1:9).

Since not all sins are created equal(John 19:11; Matt. 12:32), the believer is obligated to do the lesser evil. God's forgiveness is always available.

Graded Absolutism:

Reformed Tradition (notable proponents include Charles Hodge & Norman Geisler).

1. There are higher and lower moral laws: (a) love for God over love of man (Matt. 22:36-38; Luke 14:26), (b) obey God over govt (Acts 4-5; Dan. 3); (c) Mercy over veracity (Heb. 11: cf. Josh 6:17; Eph. 4:25). There are many moral principles rooted in the absolute moral character of God.
2. There are unavoidable moral conflicts between God's commands in a fallen world.
3. No guilt is imputed for the unavoidable: (a) logic dictates God will not hold a person responsible for doing what is actually impossible; (b) praise-worthy & exemplary conduct of keeping higher obligation absolves one of any responsibility to lower duty.

The believer is obligated to always follow the higher command. no guilt incurred when obedient to higher law.

Aretaic Graded Absolutism:

Complimentary Integration of Graded View with Christian Virtue Ethics (Paul R. Shockley)

4. A balanced emphasis on both obligation to be obedient to God's absolutes & character development of virtues derived from biblical principles (Rom. 12:1-2; Phil. 4:8; 2 Cor. 5:9-10).
5. A virtue is a habit of Christ-like excellence, a biblical tendency, a wise disposition that assists the believer in conforming to Christ-likeness in desires, affections, intentions, & actions, all in dependency upon the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:13-26).
6. Character is the sum-total of one's habits (Wisdom Lit).

Since God is concerned with both inner character & outward action, the believer is obligated to inculcate God's commands that will lead to a Christ-conforming way of living.

Moral conflicts from the Bible often cited include the following: (1) Kill son vs. obedience to God in account of Abraham & Isaac (Gen. 22 cf. Exod. 20:13); (2) Samson's suicide despite moral prohibition against killing a human being, including oneself (Judg. 16:30); (3) Jephthah's sacrifice of daughter (Judg. 11) is used as vow to God vs. killing an innocent life; (4) Lying & civil disobedience vs. mercy with Hebrew Midwives in Exodus 1; (5) Lying vs. mercy with Rahab (Joshua 2); (6) Civil disobedience vs. obedience to God in Jewish captives disregard to obey Nebuchadnezzar's command to worship golden image of himself (Dan. 3); (7) Daniel's disregard of Darius's command to pray only to the king (Dan. 6).

In case it is difficult to determine what the higher/lower biblical commands are in a certain situation: (1) The overall maxim maintained (Matt. 22:36-38) and most critical question asked is "What will demonstrate your love to God the most?"; (2) Intimately & rightly know the Bible; (3) Seek *all* the facts regarding your decision (no detail is trivial); (4) *Be* prayerful; (5) Stay yielded to God; (6) Seek godly counsel from your local church.