

THE END DOES NOT JUSTIFY THE MEANS

So which is it? The end does NOT justify the means? Or, the end JUSTIFIES the means? I ask because from time to time you hear both of those expressions. They cannot both be correct. Both are presented as moral principles to guide us in our decision making process. The end does NOT justify the means is to be understood in this way. I have something good in mind to do. Because what I want to do is good that does not thereby mean that I can choose any way or means to accomplish my goal. An example. I want to help people in need by giving them some monetary assistance. Can I create a made-up Go Fund Me story and post it online in order to do so? No. You can post a story that is true and ask people to give but you cannot make up a story and ask people to give. That is a lie. The end (helping needy people) does not justify the means (posting a false GoFundMe request).

But there have been some modern viewpoints especially in the pragmatic or utilitarian style that propose a different view, namely, if what you want to do is good then it doesn't really make a difference how you go about doing it. To this way of thinking, the end does indeed justify the means. An example: I want my daughter to go to an elite university because I believe she would really do well there. But she doesn't test well and probably would not get accepted with things as they are. I will help her by making a large donation to the school contingent on her being offered an athletic scholarship in a minor sport. Why not? Everybody wins. She gets in. The University gets the money and I am happy. Win. Win. Win. The end (her getting in) justifies the means (bribing her way in).

But it is a lie. There is no truth in it. These are nitty-gritty situations. But very real and common enough. The way of Jesus is the way of truth. There is no deception in him. Saint Paul, in his letter to the Philippians today counsels them and us to put on the mind of Christ. Think about the things of life the way Jesus would. What would Jesus do? That is not a poor question to ask. It is a good question. What would Jesus do? And how would he go about accomplishing it? And how would he not? He doesn't cling to being equal to God. He empties himself of vainglory. (By the way, I had to look that word up to get a precise meaning. It means to have an inordinate pride in myself or my accomplishments; conviction about my personal superiority.) There is no vainglory in Jesus but there is a lot of it in our world right now.

The last thing is that Jesus always sought to discover what his Father's will was and embrace that, obey that. If I ask myself, is that what I do each day? I do try to pray that in the morning each day but then I just go about my day. I think we all do that. But we can do better. So, the principle is The end DOES NOT justify the means.

The end does not justify the means in my moral life.
The end does not justify the means in my spiritual life.
The end does not justify the means in my sexual life.
The end does not justify the means in my work life.
The end does not justify the means in my parish life.
The end does not justify the means in my personal life.

The end does not justify the means in the world of sports.
The end does not justify the means in the world of politics.

We are to choose the path of truth and not the path of personal gain.
We are to choose the path of humility and not the path of deception.
We are to choose the path of selflessness and not the path of guaranteed victory.

Our words are important but they are not enough. Saying one thing and then doing another is not a Christ-like way to act.

We are capable of making course corrections in our lives. We are able to undergo conversions—of mind, and heart. With the help of the Lord Jesus and his power and grace. How we live. What we do. How we go about our lives. All these things make a great difference. We need God's help. But we have been assured God's help. Let us keep this in mind as we enter into the last six weeks of this election cycle. Let us pray for the grace and the desire to put on the mind of Christ in each area of our lives.

May the Lord bless us all today and give us his peace.