

Moral dilemmas in jane eyre essay

[Life](#), [Emotions](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Conscience is the human ability to distinguish right from wrong. In Jane Eyre, the characters demonstrate many struggles with their own consciences and their moral values. Although some characters succumb to their temptations in the novel, others like Jane are able to stay true to their inner selves and learn from their mistakes.

One's moral values and inner truth are the things that one must strive to find, and to maintain. It is important that once one finds them, one upholds his or her commitment to them, as a guide throughout life. One of Jane Eyre's central topics is the conflict between Man and morals. Since Saint John, Rochester and Jane are the most important characters in the novel, they are naturally the focal points for the most in-depth analyses. All of them deal with moral dilemmas, in which decisions have to be made and the outcome having a serious influence on their lives. Sometimes, they make choices not only for themselves, but to comply with the will of a greater power.

One person who truly stood by his ideals and strived to please God is Saint John Rivers. When analyzing Saint John, one can determine that he is at one end of the human spectrum of humanity. Just like his name indicates, he is like a saint, wanting to be a missionary who commits himself entirely to his quest. His belief is that by starving the flesh, one will be rewarded in heaven. This belief is shared by Helen Burns, another saint-like figure in the novel. The reasoning behind his choices are moral and in obedience to God. He is very devoted to his religious life and this can be clearly seen when he states this devotion to a superior cause by stating “ I am the servant of an infallible Master.

I am not going out under human guidance, subject to the defective laws and erring control of my feeble fellow-worms: my king, my lawgiver, my captain, is the All-perfect. " (Page 404) St. John can be seen by people to be very selfish for wanting to marry Jane solely for his own cause and necessity, however we see that he is in fact quite altruistic. He gives up his chance at love with Rosamond in the novel in order to fulfill his true passion and sustain his own personal integrity. Saint John says " Now... That little space was given to delirium and delusion. I rested my temples on the breast of temptation, and put my neck voluntarily under her [Rosamond's] yoke of flowers. I tasted her cup.

[...] It is strange, that while I love Rosamond Oliver so wildly... that she would not make me a good wife. "(Page 376) proving that he has fallen into temptation with Rosamond. Furthermore, he does not believe she would be fit to be his wife because she is not worthy enough for his cause, reassuring Jane of this when he says " Rosamond a sufferer, a labourer, a female apostle? Rosamond a missionary's wife? No! "(Page 376) Saint John ultimately ends up going to India without Jane, staying true to his morals and beliefs, enforced by his sense of a superior purpose.

On a very contradictory note, Rochester initially rejects any belief in God and chooses even to defy Him. This is seen when Rochester states " Is there not love in my heart and constancy in my resolves? It will expiate at God's tribunal. I know my Maker sanctions what I do.

For the world's judgement – I wash my hands thereof. For man's opinion – I defy it. "(Page 258) It is evident that Rochester is a bold man, who although

tries to follow his conscience, is usually lead into temptation. He tells Jane that prior to meeting her, he had had mistresses, showing his temptation in pleasures of the flesh (Page 313). However, most importantly, he goes against his better judgement, for the sake of love, when he asks Jane to marry him despite the fact that he is already married. He admits to his falling into temptation when he says: ‘ What did I do, Jane? I transformed myself into a Will-o’-the-wisp. Where did I go? I pursued wanderings as wild as those of the March-spirit, I sought the Continent, and went devious through all its lands. My fixed desire was to see and find a good and intelligent woman, and whom I could love: a contrast to the fury I left at Thornfield-’ (Page 312) In this statement, Rochester tries to justify himself when he obviously only emphasizes his fault.

Rochester is a victim of his own passion and goes against his conscience and against his morals. He shows a clear example of an unsuccessful attempt to oblige to one’s own conscience and ideals. Despite great passions and intense feelings, Jane is the character who is very strong and stays true to herself and her moral values. Jane always stands by her convictions and “ plants her foot” there, refusing to oblige to any other form of understanding.

She firmly states, “ I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will keep the law given by God; sanctioned by man. (Page 319) She believes that moral rules are meant to be respected, and to be put into use when times are difficult, not when life is found to be easy. It is easy to follow rules when the circumstances agree with them. However true character is shown when one respects these moral

values and principles when one's eyes are blinded by passion, love, anger and any other overpowering emotion. Not only does she deprive Rochester of her love, but also later on she denies Saint John her consent to marry him. She wanted to please him, but in doing so, she would be compromising who she really is. She makes this clear to the reader by declaring: I daily wished more to please him: but to do so, I felt daily more and more that I must disown half my nature, stifle half my faculties, wrest my tastes from their original bent, force myself to the adoption of pursuits for which I had no natural vocation.

He wanted to train me to an elevation I could never reach; it racked me hourly to aspire to the standard he uplifted. The thing was as impossible as to mold my irregular features to his correct and classic pattern, to give to my changeable green eyes the sea-blue tint and solemn luster of his own. (Page 401) It would be simple for Jane to abandon her preconceived thoughts of self in order to please Saint John, but in doing this, she would only be wronging herself. Throughout the novel, Jane stays true to herself under all circumstances. She learns early on from Helen Burns that in all difficult situations, one's personal integrity, conscience and moral values should always remain intact.

It is this inner strength possessed by Jane that enables her to strive throughout the novel and undergo the transformation that eventually shapes her into who she is at the end of the story. True strength of character is something that is difficult to develop. Jane Eyre is a novel that deals with many characters who undergo transformations, some becoming stronger

mentally and emotionally than others. Saint John is one who is very strong psychologically, following logic and rarely giving in to temptation, while Rochester easily surrenders to his emotions.

Jane however, is the one character who is realistically a role model for humanity. She gives readers vivid examples on how to act in determined situations. Her journey is not an easy one, and her choices are of the most simple, yet also extremely difficult. However, her great inner strength is finally rewarded and in the end, she perseveres. In some cases, it is easier to stay true to oneself and one's values, depending on the circumstances. In others, decisions are not as easily made.

In the end, the choices one makes in a moral dilemma are what define one's character, nature, and being.