

Responding to the New Atheists' attacks on the God of the Old Testament-22: "Child Abuse" Abraham, Isaac, and Euthyphro.2

God's command to Abraham to murder his innocent child is a perfect illustration of the issue of God and the basis of morality in what is known as the Euthyphro Dilemma: is something moral *merely* because God says it or is morality a reality apart from God and thus something that God Himself needs to obey? To hold that something is right simply because God willed it makes morality arbitrary (divine-command theory of morality); to hold that morality is outside of God means that one does not need God for morality or that God must be under some other moral authority. Calvinists hold to the former and say that God is morally justified in selecting some for Hell; atheists tend to hold to the latter as they suppress and deny the existence of God (Rom. 1:20) while trying to hold to the reality of a moral order in the universe. In the last DDR, I covered the historical setting of the Euthyphro Dilemma, in this essay I would like to bring our attention back to Abraham.

It is clear that Abraham loved his son—not only from God's reference to Isaac as "your only son, whom you love," but also, I think, from Abraham's answer to Isaac's question, an answer that seems intended to shield Isaac as long as possible. But it was certainly clear that Abraham was prepared to carry out God's command: "he stretched out his hand and took the knife *to kill* his son." How are the two facts of Abraham loving his son and his unhesitating intent to carry out God's command to kill him to be reconciled? How could Abraham love his son so much and be so willing to kill his beloved all the while having an incredible confidence and peace in the goodness of God? There are three common answers or thoughts given to this question. I would like to explore each answer with the goal of enabling us to appreciate the intrinsic goodness of God. In this DDR, I will consider the first answer.

It is assumed by some that Abraham was prepared to kill his only son, whom he loved, because he was afraid of what God would do to him if he disobeyed or hopeful for some reward for his obedience. In this case Abraham would be thinking something like: "I know that what I'm about to do is horrible, but who knows what awful thing might happen to me if I don't do it, or what marvelous blessings God might give me if I go through with it?" In other words, the behavior of Abraham would simply be the prudent thing to do, and as such would not be moral at all. When a moral issue as stark as the one in this story is overridden by considerations of prudence, prudent behavior is immoral behavior. In such a case, God need not even be particularly good to be repelled by such a pragmatic character.

The very fact that the story ends with God's rewarding Abraham as He does is powerful evidence against this first view that sees Abraham just being pragmatic. Furthermore, obeying commands, even divine commands, out of fear or punishment or hope of reward cannot count as intrinsic *moral* behavior. This answer would make the story of Abraham and Isaac irrelevant to

our investigation of the relationship between God and morality/goodness. In the next DDR, we will take a look at a second answer (the divine-command theory).

We are all another day closer to being face-to-face with 'Ehyeh - אֶהְיֶה,

1 John 3:2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is [His very essence/Esse].

Pastor Don