

Responding to the New Atheists' attacks on the God of the Old Testament-23: "Child Abuse" Abraham, Isaac, and Euthyphro.3

We are in the midst of examining three ways people have looked at the issue of Abraham's deep love for Isaac yet complete willingness to murder him at the command of God—all in light of the issue of moral goodness. How does God relate to morality? Is morality simply what God commands with no ontological status of its own? In other words, if Abraham murdered Isaac at the command of God, would that make it a moral thing to do? Or is morality some objective thing woven in the fabric of the universe that God Himself must submit to? Or as the Euthyphro Dilemma puts it, "Are morally good acts willed by God because they are morally good, or are they morally good because they are willed by God?"

In the last daily doctrine we noted the failure of the first typical response, namely that Abraham was simply being pragmatic in obeying the command out of fear or desire for blessings. However, being pragmatic or prudent certainly does not count as morally good behavior. More often than not, moral goodness is standing up against some type of pragmatism. Look how political expediency/pragmatism is destroying our country.

A second response as to the question why Abraham was prepared to kill his beloved son at God's command is that Abraham actually believed that the horrible act *had been made morally* right simply by the fact that God commanded it. As I have mentioned, this is the divine-command theory of ethics. There are a lot of Christians who believe this to be the case. There are even believers in the Old Testament who believed this as well: like Job's three friends and Elihu, most notably Elihu. Though it sounds pious, let's remember that God sided with Job against the four who held to a divine-command theory of ethics. Believers who hold to the divine-command theory of ethics generally do not have a very deep or developed understanding of moral goodness and especially the *intrinsic goodness* in God Himself—because God's will is the only issue. They posit goodness as simply something that He commands in His sovereignty. This precludes them from really understanding God's essential goodness because they are blinded by His sovereignty. They tend to think of Him in terms of Power and Sovereignty (which, in their minds, automatically translate into goodness) rather than essential goodness in the nature of God Himself. This is unfortunate and the primary reason God said that Job's four interlocutors spoke of Him what was not right whereas Job spoke what was right—even though the four earnestly sought to defend God and spoke accurate doctrine in contrast to Job who often said blasphemous things (inaccurate doctrine).

Job 42:7 And it came about after the LORD had spoken these words to Job, that the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, "My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, because you have not spoken of Me what is right as My servant Job has.

Although Job did not speak rightly in content, he did in attitude because he knew that something was not good simply *because* God decreed it—he spoke with right attitude about goodness and God, and was not only commended for it, he actually grew closer to God than the others who really did not understand the issue of moral goodness and God. We will spend more time unpacking this at Faith Bible Church when we get to chapter forty-two.

According to the divine-command theory of ethics (DCE), Abraham would have believed that God's command to kill Isaac was made right *because* God *commanded it*. And if Abraham was an adherent to DCE, he would have believed that that same deed was then *made morally wrong* just *because* then, at the last possible moment, God *prohibited* it. While this may have been what Elihu and virtually all legalists believe, it was not the attitude of Abraham. Generally speaking, those who hold to DCE are not even able to feel the horrors of a father killing his own son. If a father's killing his innocent son, whom he loves, is not an example horrible enough for you, you may be left to your darkest imaginations.

The bottom line here in DCE is an ethics or moral goodness that is grounded *only* in the will of God (as per Elihu's view). If this is the case then there is no such thing as objective moral goodness as a reality in and of itself. Not only do DCE adherents destroy moral intrinsic goodness as an objective reality, they end up damaging the true and good concept of God. If God's command is all that makes the action right, and I believe God will punish me for disobedience, how can I convince myself that I perform the action because it is right rather than simply out of fear? Abraham was not so willing to kill Isaac because he was afraid of God or believed that it was only right because God commanded it. He had *too strong* a belief in and *great* of an appreciation of the objectivity of moral goodness and the objective goodness within God Himself to entertain such thoughts. This insight was gained through Bible doctrine in the field of testing. It is one thing for a believer who is suffering to believe that such suffering must be good because it is in the will of God, it is something else to see that suffering in light of objective goodness. It is one thing for a believer to accept God's will as good because he is suppose to, it is different altogether to see the goodness in God's character as an objective reality.

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