

Responding to the New Atheists' attacks on the God of the Old Testament-25: "Child Abuse" God and Goodness; Euthyphro.5

How are we to think of the relation between God and moral goodness? By "moral goodness," I am not referring to divine good which is the produced by God the Holy Spirit in the believer (*ἀγαθωσύνη*, Gal. 5:22) who is walking in fellowship with God (1 John 1:7-9). Moral goodness refers to a moral (or divine establishment goodness) to which the believer and the unbeliever alike are responsible:

Romans 2:14-15 For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, 15 in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them,

Genesis 15:16 "Then in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete."

What makes something morally good? Or an even more difficult question—to which every Christian should know well enough to be conversant about—is "What does the goodness of God refer to?" Apart from a developed understanding of classical theism and philosophical realism, a believer must project into the term "goodness" of God their own ideas of what goodness means to them since "goodness" of God is never defined in the Bible. Due to anti-philosophical attitude in contemporary Christianity (that has been about eighty years in the making), I doubt that more than one tenth of one percent of born-again Christians in contemporary Christianity could define and describe what the goodness of God actually is ontologically. Does it seem strange that Christians go around talking about how good God is and yet not know what goodness in God actually refers to? While I think doctrinal believers would certainly fair much better in being able to describe what the goodness of God is, we need to understand goodness and other attributes of God as well as we understand the spiritual life and the various problem solving devices. We should be as fluent in God-talk as we are in talk about the spiritual life and salvation. This Sunday we are going to take a dip in the deep end of the pool by looking at the timelessness of God, which is introduced in our next chapter of Job. The culpability of doctrinal believers not having a philosophically developed understanding of the attributes and nature of God is mainly on pastor-teachers. The onus is on us. Before I introduce the goodness of God in this essay, I would like to review a bit more time on the relation of God and moral goodness via the Euthyphro Dilemma.

It is through such philosophical exercises as the Euthyphro Dilemma (ED) that enables a believer to gain philosophical capacity to understand abstract concepts like goodness more concretely. In the (ED) recast into the Abrahamic-Isaac-God Dilemma the question is “is the good loved by God because it is good. Or should we think of God as somehow subject to standards of moral goodness distinct from Himself?” “Does God will X because it is morally good? Or is X morally good because God wills it?” If we say that God wills X because it is morally wrong it seems as if there is a good outside of God. If we say that X is morally good because God wills it then it seems we cannot know what good is unless God reveals His will. But how can that be with reference to everything? Normally, we have moral instincts that enable us to tell the difference between moral goodness and wickedness. We do not take moral good as *merely* a result of a decree of God. Aren’t there things that we know are wrong that we do not have divine decrees/revelation on—like human cannibalism of the dead? So why should we suppose that something is only morally good *because* God wills it? This would seem to preclude the uninformed pagan from knowing good and evil; yet they are held accountable for their wickedness (Gen. 15:16). Calvinists believe something is good just because God willed it. So, when God decrees that people burn in Hell, that in and of itself makes it a good thing—simply because God capriciously decreed it. He makes it right by His will! Interestingly, Elihu’s four tormentors shared the “pious” view that right was made right by the will of God, and they are soundly censured by God.

For others, like Immanuel Kant, moral truths are independent of God; they have an ontological status apart from God’s will. On Kant’s account, God is significant when it comes morality only as ensuring that the requirements of morality are met. Although the majority of those who believe that moral goodness has an autonomous existence apart from God are atheists, there are liberal theists who maintain that morality cannot be based on religion/God for it is moral goodness that gives insight into the worthiness of God to be worshipped.

If moral goodness exists in the will of God, God has everything to do with morality. If moral goodness is a reality that is outside of God, God has nothing to do with morality. The two horns of the dilemma offer two radically different answers to the question on the relation between the existence of God and moral goodness, either God has *absolutely everything* to do with morality or *absolutely nothing*.

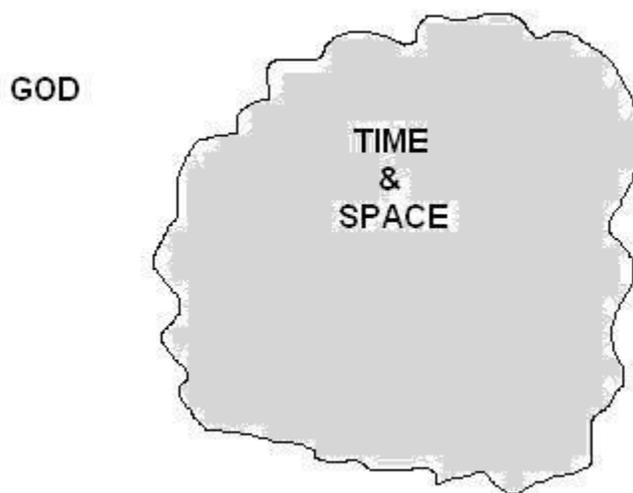
Now let’s move into an introduction of the *goodness* of God. What do you mean when you say that this is a *good* friend, a *good* car, a *good* watch, a *good* meal, or a *good* pet? What do you think God meant as Creator when He said about His creation (e.g., moon, vegetation, animals) “that it was good” (כִּי-טוֹב)? A common characteristic of goodness in all of these uses is these entities are fitting, just right, in fact even perfect in accordance with what they are suppose to be. By way of analogy, this is how to view the goodness of God. The goodness of God as an ontological matter is not some reference to God as a kind or grandfatherly Figure who indulges His children or even a reference to His grace and mercy. God’s goodness refers to Him being an absolutely perfect being as God. As God, He is good in that sense: He is what God should be. He is the absolute perfect being, and this concept is very important in understanding the relation between God and moral goodness.

This goodness of God is also tethered to all of the attributes and most notably to the doctrine of the simplicity of God—the single most difficult doctrine to understand and the easiest to misunderstand and misstate. To say that the absolutely perfect/good Being is absolutely simple is to say that He is altogether without components or any kind—spatial or otherwise. Furthermore, to say that God is absolutely simple is to say that God cannot be distinguishable

from any of His attributes. In other words, "God is identical with His goodness." I will cover how God can have different attributes and yet be identical to these attributes in the next daily doctrine.

Before we move into philosophical understanding of the essence of God in the next DDR and in our next FBC Bible class, I would like to touch on the importance of having a philosophical understanding of God. In considering the difference between (not contrast) a philosophical understanding of God and *only* Bible understanding of God is that in the former you have a far greater and more magnificent view of God. The Bible-only view of God gives us a God who has a body, forgets, repents, gives birth, fathers, is spatial, and learns things through time, cf., "and He said, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for *now I know* that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." The Bible is filled with anthropopathisms, anthropomorphisms, and "anthropochonologisms." The Bible-only portrait of God, written in the language accommodation, is far inferior to the view of God that accounts for all of the biblical data yet understands that God transcends all of these depictions. In other words, if we compare the philosophical-biblical view of God with the Bible-only view of God, the philosophical-biblical view of God is far greater. Which leads me to ask, "Is it possible to conceive of a God who is intrinsically greater than He really is?" I think not!

The timelessness of God (which subject matter we will dive into Sunday at FBC) illustrated:



Pastor Don