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Should God Be Held Morally Accountable for Knowingly Creating a World Where People Would Sin?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about whether we should hold God morally accountable for knowingly creating a world where people would sin, whether the crucifixion of Jesus was God's way of taking some personal responsibility for his part in bringing about sin through creation, and why God creates people he knows will go to Hell.

- * If we would hold someone morally accountable for giving a suicidal person access to a loaded gun, shouldn't we hold God morally accountable for creating a world where he knew people would sin?
- * Was the crucifixion of Jesus God's way of taking some personal responsibility for his part in bringing about sin he knew would take place if he created Adam and Eve?
- * Why would God create a person he knows will go to Hell?

Transcript

I'm Amy Hall, I'm here with Greg Cogle, and you're listening to the hashtag STRaskPodcasts from Stand to Reason. I'm Greg Cogle, and I'm here with Amy Hall, and you're listening to me. Okay, Greg, now I have the first two questions are from the same person.

They're kind of related, so we'll start with his first one, and then we'll get his follow up one. This is from John D. How do you respond to the idea that because it is entirely legitimate to hold someone morally accountable for knowingly giving a suicidal person access to a loaded gun that they later kill themselves with, it's also entirely legitimate to hold God morally accountable for his creation that he knew would actualize sin? I'm trying to, I've not thought about this before, and I'm trying to, I don't think there's moral parity there, but I'm trying to, to decide what the distinction is. I'm trying to make it clear.

Yeah, I guess, to me, there's a, okay, here's the illustration I've used in the past in general for this. Parents know that when they have children, their children are going to do bad things, because everybody does bad things. Now, what they don't have is exhaustive knowledge of that, but they don't have to do that.

They know it's going to take place. They don't know what those things happen to be, but does the fact that human beings create other human beings, they know are going to do evil of some sort, and it may be the case that they are going to do great evil. Does that mean that the parents themselves are responsible for the evil that's done by free will agents? Okay, now in the case of the gun circumstance, it just strikes me as something entirely different.

What you are doing is aiding and abetting, purposefully aiding and abetting, the evil that you know somebody is planning to do in advance. Okay? And that strikes me as not parallel to the situation that God is in. Okay? So variations of this question have come up at different times.

Isn't God responsible for what moral agents, free will be, what do moral agents do if he knows that they are going to do them? My answer is no, he's not responsible because that's the nature of moral freedom. If you give human beings a good thing, moral freedom, ironically I was just reading in the story of reality, my chapter on this issue the other day, I'm in the airplane reading my own book. I like that book a lot.

And the whole point there is does God have a morally sufficient reason for allowing the possibility or even the eventuality of evil? And that's the whole problem of evil question. And the answer is if God, in principle God could have a good reason for allowing that. Okay? And therefore there's no necessary contradiction between God's power and God's goodness when it comes to the problem of evil.

And different people cast this out in different ways, but the way I cast it out in the story of reality is that human God is creating a type of creature in the world that he can share his friendship with so that they can share in his happiness. And the only kind of creature that is capable of doing that is a being that is made in his image that is a moral creature that has the opportunity to choose between good and bad and make sufficient and to make, how do I call it, like deep freedom so they can make decisions on their own that really matter. And those are the kind of decisions that are going to allow them to develop the kind of goodness that will be a part of their experience that then allows them to share the happiness that God has.

God is perfectly happy because he's perfectly good. And so we made creatures that could grow in goodness to experience his happiness and share a relationship with him. That's the upside, so to speak.

Now, the downside is people use that same freedom to do evil. And that is the nature of

moral freedom. You can't say you have the moral freedom to do good, but you don't have the moral freedom to do bad.

That's not moral freedom. And so one entails the other. And so this is what we're facing even with the loaded gun situation.

I don't think that that's a parallel. God has made the world in a certain way that has a good end to it. He has a good purpose for it.

But the way he made to accomplish the good purpose also offers the opportunity for that to be used by for evil. He is not aiding and abetting the evil. He created the world the way he did to aid in a bet, if you will, the goodness, but evil is certainly a possibility in theory and an eventuality in terms of God's understanding.

But if the amount of good is greater than the evil that results from this plan, then God has a morally sufficient reason for allowing the possibility of evil. And that's the theoticy. That's the particular explanation that I offer for people to think about.

So I have a slightly different answer, but it touches on some of the same things you said, Greg. And the first thing is everything God gives us is good. He has given us good things in nature.

He's given us good things in family. And all sorts of things that he's given us that we misuse. And I agree that it's not the same thing as purposefully abetting something bad.

He's given us good things that we misuse. Now, is God responsible for the fact that we exist? Yes. But that doesn't make him morally responsible for our sin.

And I think the only way that I can explain that is to say, and you touched on this, Greg, if what God is doing is something good. And that good thing that he's doing involves us doing bad things, not just that it's, and I wouldn't just say that it's more good than bad. I would say that the bad things we are doing are actually contributing to his good plan, like when he says all things are working together for good.

So what I think is that when God created this world, his goal was to reveal himself fully to those who would be with him forever. And this is from Ephesians, the riches of his glory forever that we would experience. And part of that is revealing certain things about himself that we wouldn't have known in a world that wasn't fallen.

And, you know, we talked about the cross in the last episode, and I think it was always, you know, it says his eternal purpose was the cross. He wanted to reveal his love and grace and justice on the cross. And so I think that involves the fallen world, even though he is not directly morally responsible for our sin, the world that he's created has sin for a good purpose.

And so even in the fact that we are sinning is something that is playing out a good end, which is the revelation of God in all his qualities, his grace, his love, his mercy, and his justice, and his wrath against sin. And so it's not the same as just giving someone a gun to shoot themselves. He's in a whole different story here.

He is working this huge story that everything is working together to glorify God for our good. And in the midst of that, people are sinning and doing these things in a smaller way, but that is not the purpose of this. The purpose is for everything that happens to work towards this glorifying of God so that we can enjoy him forever.

So let's go into the second question from John that's related to this one. I hope it's easier than the first one. Well, part of it, part of what we've already said we'll play into it.

So how do you respond to someone who says that the crucifixion of Jesus Christ was just God's way of taking some amount of personal responsibility for his part and bringing about sin that he knew would take place if he created Adam and Eve. That the crucifixion was, say that again, that last part. It was just God's way of taking some amount of personal responsibility for his part and bringing about sin that he knew would take place.

Okay. Well, so this is interesting. What this is, is a speculation.

Here's what's really going on with the crucifixion. God knows he's guilty. That's what that says.

Okay. All right. That's a speculation.

All right. Where do you get any indication anywhere in any text in any chapter in any book that that's what's going on? Oh, it's, to me, it's just a fabrication. Now, if somebody is inclined to read the Bible in a cynical fashion, they can read that motivation into God.

But now you're reading a motivation in you're saying, this is God's real motive. So how would you know that that's God's real motive? There's nothing in the text that indicates that the only thing that dictates that interpretation is your cynicism. That's it.

And it makes God a sinner. Mm hmm. And now he's paying for sin.

Well, if God's the sinner, then, then who, where is the standard in the universe for moral perfection? This pushes us into the back into the broader issue of the Bible. The grounding problem, then God's not God because God's not morally perfect. And this is just kind of another way of underscoring one answer or I should say the heart of the challenge that John D. offered first in that question.

And this is like saying the answer to John D's first question is God is responsible. He is the one who put the hand in the gun of the person that commits suicide. And now he realizes he's responsible.

So he's going to thrash himself in the cross, at least in part suffering for his own crimes. So that's a completed mention. Yeah.

And I have no reason to believe that there's any merit to that in truth at all. Yeah, again, if you're going to look at what the Bible actually says, again, it was the eternal purpose of God that Jesus would die on the cross. And the whole point is that, and this is very explicit, Jesus had nothing to atone for for himself.

And this is the whole point that it was, he took on something that we deserved that he did not deserve. So it just twists the whole, placing the blame for our sin on God. It's a very bad way to twist things.

Right. Right. Right.

But I can see how cynical people, I'm not referring to John D. or just whoever raises the issue with him. The cynical people are just going to see it that way. And frankly, if a person is cynical like that, and this is what they're trying to put on the cross, etc.

I don't see how anything that we're going to say is going to make a difference. Because this isn't really an option that's in play. I know what God was really doing.

He's nasty and he's guilty and he knew it. And so he decided to take punishment upon himself for his own sin. That's really what this point is.

But again, if God's a sinner, then he's not just. So why would he have to do it in the first place? Yeah, it's a good point. There's no point at all.

Okay, let's go on to a question from Charles Johnson, Sr. Why would God create a person who he knows is going to sin, knowing also that person will not repent and God will send the person to hell? Well, this comes up with some frequency too. And apparently I answered this question for someone six or eight months ago. And she was very impressed with the answer.

And I can't remember what I told her. Oh, great. But I think we have talked about this before on the show.

And what it comes down to is, and this goes back to some of your earlier comments. It requires us to see God's purposes in a much broader light. Okay.

And that, and this actually relates somewhat to the inductive problem of evil too. If there really was a good God, there wouldn't be so much evil in the world. Maybe there could be some evil, but not as much and evil and suffering as we see.

And my point regarding that is that there's only one person who is in a position to know the calculus on that, whether it's worth it or not. And we can't see that. God can see that.

And he's the one who decided to make the world the way he did. And what I, what I often said at this point is, and he realized it was worth the gamble, but that's just kind of a way of speaking. Obviously, it was no gamble at all.

He understands everything that's at stake. And he chooses the options that turn out to be morally sufficient. I'm not even going to say that maximize goodness because I don't know what maximal goodness actually is except for ultimately heaven, but in the resurrected state, because there's no badness at all.

But in a, in a, there's a circumstance here that God is allowed to take place. He's made human beings in a certain way for a, ultimately a good end. Which good end is adequate to justify the, or sufficiently justify the details of the plan that have a dark side to them.

Okay. And I mentioned that a little earlier was at this podcast or the earlier podcast about why God would allow evil in a circumstance. And there's, there, he has, he has building it.

He's made a human being to be like him in some ways to share in his happiness. And in order to share in his happiness, of course, there has to be a moral element in their experience. And for in that moral element entails moral freedom to be able to choose what is bad.

Okay. And this is an element of, of, of growth in virtue that human beings have the opportunity. We could grow in virtue and in godliness.

You know, godliness is a means of great gain for it holds a promise not just for this life, for the life to come. There's a growth in godliness we can experience. And that's something that God wanted for us.

I don't understand how all of that works, but that's what the text says. He wants us to grow in godliness. We can only grow in godliness if we have the ability to make choices for the good and against the bad.

And that requires a more, a profound or deep moral freedom. And our choices have to matter. Animals make choices too, but their choices don't matter that much.

But, but human beings to be in a friendship with God require a certain type of, you know, self that allows the things that God wants to accomplish in them to be accomplished. And seems to me moral freedom is one of those. There's a dark side to that, of course, but God is the one who's in a position to decide whether it was worth it or not.

So, the difficulty I have with that answer, and again, I'll go back to my answer of, of, you know, God revealing himself, the difficulty I have with that answer is that when we get to heaven, we won't be sinning ever. That's right. But we'll still be significant human beings who have a moral quality, but we, but we will be and people will ask me this all the time.

Well, why didn't God just do that from the beginning? No, I understand that. And this is part of the mystery. I mean, I know it's the question that follows immediately.

In heaven, we will have the same kind of moral freedom that God has, not that we have now. The freedom that we have now is to do evil. The freedom that we'll have then quote unquote freedom is that we will have the ability to always do what's good and never do evil because our natures will be changed.

Now, how does that all, how does that all calculate out in, in, I don't, I don't actually know. I do, I am convinced that in heaven, we, we have that we will be in a totally different category. And we will not have the kind of freedom that is the ability to do otherwise.

CDO condition, the philosophers identify as a libertarian freedom. We will not have that. God doesn't have that.

God cannot sin. It's inconsistent with his nature. But we're in a circumstance now where we can sin and choosing the good rather than evil is something that, that influences our godliness now and our status in heaven.

How that works out. I don't know because you say, well, perfectly good is perfectly good. And the illustration that I heard that someone offered that at least makes sense of this is you could have a, you could have a perfect, a perfect, a perfect, a perfect, a perfect, a perfect, a perfect, a perfect, a perfect, a perfect, a perfect, a perfect.

100 watt light bulb and you could have a perfect 1000 watt light bulb. You know, they are both perfect. They both shine light at their total capacity, but the capacity to shine light is different.

And so there's a sense, there may be a sense in which our godliness, though we are in moral perfection when we're in heaven that we are certainly in different, we have different capacities for, for expressing glory. Okay. Momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory.

Second Corinthians four. So there's whatever that weight of glory is that weight is not the same for everybody, because everybody doesn't have the same affliction that contributes to the weight of glory. So I'm trying to take all of these things together and say, well, these are the factors that seem to inform the, the, the point that I was making.

But there's sure is a lot of mystery to it. No question. So let me add one more factor into here.

Of course, if the question is why would God create someone that he knows is will go to hell? I think the answer, I mean, I think that Romans nine directly addresses this question. And it's in terms of the idea of God revealing himself, which is what I was

talking before. And he doesn't a couple places.

Let's see here. First, he says, he's talking about how, you know, God has mercy on whom he has mercy and he has compassion on whom he has compassion. And then he says, for the scripture says to Pharaoh, for this very purpose I raised you up to demonstrate my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth.

So then he has mercy on whom he desires and he hardens whom he desires. And then Paul says, yeah, you will say to me, then why does he still find fault for who resists his will? And then he says, well, who answers back to God? And then he brings it home by saying that, you know, what, what if, what if God wanting to demonstrate his wrath and to make his power known endured with much patience, vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? And he did so to make known the riches of his glory upon vessels of mercy, which he prepared beforehand for glory. So there's a sense in which the existence of people who will go to hell is revealing God's glory and grace to the people he has mercy on.

Yes, in forgiveness. So in other words, they see, they will see God's, you know, Paul mentions his power. They'll see his justice.

They'll see what they deserved and they will understand the riches of the glory of his mercy much better, which is the goal of God's entire creation. Because there are people who will justly go to hell. And I think here is where people need to remember it is just for them to go to hell.

It's not, it's not that God is using them. They actually deserve to go. We all deserve to go.

But the reason why he doesn't save all according to this passage is because there's a purpose. They have a purpose also in, in this overall point of God's creation, which is to reveal the glory of his mercy upon his vessels of mercy. Yeah.

That's kind of a hard saying. I just finished the chapter in RC Spro book yesterday. And it was like hard sayings, 25 hard sayings or whatever.

And this was one of them. And his point was the key here is that there is no injustice with God. Those that get punished get punished because they deserve justice.

Those that get forgiven. The mercy has shown them. And the mercy is is much more vivid.

And this is your point because of the justice that others received. You see what that looks like. We didn't get that.

We got mercy. We did not receive. And that just magnifies God's glory.

Because we see, pardon me, his justice at the same time. The justice is what gives mercy meaning. Something like that.

And so it all has a purpose. I think this all comes down to understanding what the goal of the world is. Is it for us to be comfortable? Is that God's goal? Or is it that God is creating a world where he is revealing himself fully to his people so that they can be with him forever? So this race is another question.

I guess some would say what God would really, really like. And maybe there's different ways to answer this depending on what one means here. But is that everybody gets saved? I'm thinking for example of William, William Link Craig who talks about these and what the greatest in this is how he, I think what motivates his construction of his middle knowledge.

Kind of approach to this is that God is trying to actualize the world in which most people will freely receive him. And it is not the case that there is a possible world in which everyone would freely receive him. But he's talking there more in terms of individual choices.

What you're saying though is that that isn't even God's ultimate purpose. Because if everybody receives mercy, then nobody knows the value of the mercy they received because there is no contrasting judgment being experienced by someone that gives meaning to the mercy. That's what Romans 9 seems to be saying.

And I think it's more than that too because it talks about he is revealing his power and his wrath against sin and making his name known. So it's about, I think it's about revealing God and I think it's secondarily so that we can see the riches of his mercy. But yeah, I think that's what the text seems to be saying.

Hard sayings. Yeah, yeah for sure. But again, I think the key to understanding all this is to understand God's righteousness and our sin.

And I think we've failed to understand both of those and we end up thinking we deserve something else and that God owes us something. And those are hard things to understand. You mentioned R.C. Sproul, his book, *The Holiness of God*, I think is very helpful with that.

Alright, we're out of time. Thank you, John D. And Charles, we appreciate hearing from you. Send us your question on Twitter with the hashtag STRask or through our website at str.org. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cogle for Stand to Reason.