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Can You Argue Straight from the Existence of Evil to the Existence of the Christian God?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about whether one can argue from the existence of evil straight to the Christian God or if more arguments are required to get there and whether Abraham sacrificing Isaac would be considered a good action since God commanded it.

* Does the existence of evil argue for the God of the Bible or only for a monotheistic God in general?

* If Abraham sacrificed Isaac, would the action be considered good since God commanded it?

Transcript

This is Amy Hall. I'm here with Greg Koukl and you're listening to the hashtag SDR-esque podcast from Stand to Reason. Welcome and welcome, Greg.

Thank you. All right. Here's a question from Dave.

Greg reasons if evil then the God of the Bible of the Bible. Is that straight line reasoning or does the existence of the Christian God? Because of evil only lead to the God of the monotheistic religion and one must then further reason whether the law giver is a haramazda or weguru or alla or another? I don't think I've ever reasoned that the problem of evil leads to the God of the Bible. I think I've said that that takes additional steps.

Now some might want to reason them in that way, but I mean they might attempt to, but that isn't my project. I'm just taking one step at a time. If there is a problem of evil, that's because by the way it has to be objective evil or else there's no problem of evil.

There's got to be evil in the world because in the world, bad things have been done. And bad things have been done. That means some kind of moral obligation or rule or law has been violated to identify the bad thing.

And that requires a law maker that is adequate to the task. So if there are transcendent moral laws, it has to be a transcendent moral law maker that has the proper authority to make the laws for the universe. Now that would fit with a common theistic understanding of God.

I don't know about a haramazda. That is a monotheistic religion. And I'm from a monotheistic religion.

Can't remember which one right now I think it may be. Can't remember. A very small one.

But nevertheless, my argument is simply regarding God. And then to make the case for the God of the Bible, we have to ask other questions. Has God spoken, for example? Has he appeared in any way and revealed anything about himself in a way that we can trust him rely on it? Now that, of course, is the claim of the major monotheistic religions.

And the question then is, how do we know which God is the correct God? They're not all the same. And I would make an exception between the God of Israel and the God of Christianity because Christianity is an extension of Hebrew religion. It's not an extension that Jews today acknowledge, but theologically it's an extension.

So we are talking about the same individual. Islam is not such an extension. And it may be that Jews, even observant Jews, do not believe in the Trinity.

And so I would say that God of the Old Testament is triune, but that detail is not revealed into the New Testament. Because the significance of the Trinity is most important to us with regards to plan of salvation. And all members of the Trinity play an important part.

And this is why in progressive revelation, this becomes more clear. Okay. But I still hold that we're talking about the same God in Judaism and Christianity.

Not the same with Islam and not the same with Urimazdu. Again, I'm frustrated because I can't think of the religion. He represents, but any other monotheistic religion, you have to have a God over the universe to make sense of the moral project.

And that's all I'm arguing in the moral argument. One thing you can tell from the moral argument is that God is good. And that's because the evil causes guilt.

We have a, we filled the obligation and the duty to do good, which means we are being held to the good side. So it does point to God's goodness. Well, that would have applied to the God of Islam as well, wouldn't it? Probably, but I'm just saying.

Not uniquely to the God of the Bible. Right. But I'm just saying that it does point to some aspect of God, but not specifically to one or the other.

Right. Right. And I don't, but I have argued that if there is no God to ground goodness,

then there cannot be goodness, not moral obligations that are the essence of morality.

And the reason is the only alternative is a kind of like platonic idealism or moral idealism, a platonic moral platonism, I guess is the right term. And there are a lot of difficulties with that particular view. Most people are not familiar with it.

It doesn't matter. It doesn't work. But if those who are more philosophically minded, this is an option that has been offered.

The simplest, most straightforward way of understanding the reality of evil in the world is the reality of objective good. The objective good needs a grounding and that is the grounding it gets is within the person and the nature of the God who is overall creation. And that as Francis Schaeffer would say is not just an answer, it is the answer.

It's the only answer that satisfies all the requirements that we're facing philosophically. You can correct me if I'm wrong, but is it the case that the God of Islam, there's there's somewhat arbitrariness to what he does that there are some examples of where someone is saved no matter what or someone is is damned no matter what. Like an element of fate or something where there's there's some aspect that's kind of arbitrary.

If Allah wills kind of thing, that's my understanding too, but I cannot flush that out very well for you. That would be something for Ellen Schleeman. So I'll just hypothetically, let's say that's the case.

Now that that would be I don't think that would go with the moral argument because I think it the moral argument also requires adjust God. If God doesn't care about you, or God doesn't punish evil fully and reward good fully, then I think that is also a problem. I think that I think we have a sense of justice and we have a sense of the necessity of justice.

So if there's a religion where even a monotheistic religion where God sweeps evil under the rug in some way, I think that's. That would be a compromise of goodness. Right.

Right. So in that sense, Christianity really is the only religion where you have justice and grace. So where it's possible for anyone to be saved and still maintain justice because you either have to lower your bar of justice or you have to bar everyone from any sort of reward.

Because there's only justice. Right. Right.

Right. Right. So I think there are good reasons to think this points to a Christian God, even if you have to take it somewhere else, I think there are aspects of the argument that do point to the Christian God.

Okay. This question comes from Black Russ. If Abraham sacrificed Isaac, would the

action be considered good since God commanded it? Another hypothetical? Well, it's, but it's not so far removed from sound kind of moral discourse thinking.

How does this work out? If God commands something and God is good, then the command is a good command. And I want to qualify this with regards to Abraham and Isaac because it turns out that God did command the execution of all kinds of people. He does that right in the beginning of the Bible.

Genesis chapter nine, verse six, if man sheds man's blood, then by man his blood shall be shed for in the image of God, God created man. In other words, there is a justification for capital punishment because of the capital punishment of image bearers. Because in that particular case, the punishment fits the crime.

It's called Lex Talionis or the law of the law. And all it means, I mean, I for nine and a two for a tooth is the common way of putting it. But the sense there is not personal revenge.

Jesus made that clear. The sense is that punishments must fit the crime. Okay.

And so here we have God affirming taking of their life. And we see not just in that particular instance, but I think there are 12 laws or crimes, violations of law in the Mosaic law that were capital offenses that required capital punishment. And then there were the times that God sent the Jews against other nations as an act of judgment on them.

And a time when God arranged sovereignly for other nations to be a punishment for the Jews. That was a little different category here, morally speaking, because they were held responsible for that because a few point out their motivations were all wrong. But nevertheless, even in the case of the Jews, that Jews were told to do these things under these circumstances and take human life.

So there God has a right to take life without any further moral justification in my view because he's God. And the means by which he takes them can be different. It could be through flood.

It could be through famine. It could be through pestilence. And ironically, I was just reading in the book of Ezekiel where God identifies these different ways that God is going to do it.

And God is going to be a leading army, the Hebrew army or non-Hebrew. So as a general principle, God can command that life be taken. And if God commands it to be taken, then it's appropriate to do it.

Now, in this situation, you have a unique concern. And that is, it appears like this is a mere human sacrifice. There is nothing that Isaac did wrong.

And therefore God is having Abraham do a mere sacrifice to appease God of his son that

is innocent. All right. Now, we know that there's typological elements here that go to Christ, et cetera, but just taking this whole circumstance and isolation.

There are two things that are interesting. First of all, Abraham did not think he was going to have to kill Isaac. And this is clear when you read the entire account because as they're approaching the amount with another servant, the servant is left behind and Abraham in his son ascended the mountain.

And the servant is told by Abraham, we will return. And then when Isaac asks about the sacrifice, what Abraham says is God will provide the sacrifice. So this seems to be Abraham's understanding all along that this is not the kind of God that's going to require this kind of thing.

Okay. But even if he would, Abraham understood that given this is the child of promise, then God is going to have to raise him, raise him from the dead. And that comes out in the book of Romans.

I think that's it. Okay. It's somewhere in the New Testament.

Yeah. Yeah, that's right. Okay.

So Abraham is depending on aspects of God's character to maintain the life one way or another of this boy. Okay. Now as it turns out, he's not required to sacrifice.

He has stopped. Once his obedience is tested, he has stopped and God provides a ram. Okay.

Now this next observation I got from David Wood on a video. He's a Muslim apologist. And an apologist to a Christian apologist regarding Islam.

Thank you for that. And David said he made the point that in that culture that this was the way that any individual could show his absolute fidelity unquestioned fidelity to his God. And that was to sacrifice his children, which is what a lot of what the Canaanites were doing all the time.

And it was an abomination to God. Now the details of the abomination come out later in the law prior to or after Abraham. But nevertheless, it was clear that Abraham understood enough about this God to know he wasn't going to sacrifice Isaac, probably.

But what God demonstrates by stopping Isaac, I'm sorry, Abraham from sacrificing Isaac at the last moment is hit the contrast, not the similarity, but the contrast of him to the pagan deities of the day who required that kind of sacrifice. And essentially, as David Wood points out, God is saying, I'm not that kind of God. I'm testing your faithfulness just the way in a culturally relevant way, would you be willing to sacrifice your only son? And Abraham says, okay, that's what you say.

So there's his fidelity to God. And then God says, I'm glad to hear that, but I want you to know something. I'm not the kind of guy who requires that from his people.

And then of course, those details show up later in the law. So I thought that was a very, very profound insight regarding that circumstance. So I would add, I think I actually do think that Abraham thought he was going to have to kill Isaac.

And the reason why I say that is because that's the reason given in Hebrews that he says he reasoned God could raise him from the dead. So what I think I think what God was showing when he stopped him is that he redeems those headed for death. It's similar to how he tells the Israelites, he, all of the firstborn are his, but they have to redeem them.

They have to, they kill the firstborn animals, but they redeem the firstborn sons, even though they rightly belong to him. So again, this is all prefiguring Christ, of course, but I think that what we see there is God redeems those headed for death. Now, I would also say when, when the question is asked, you know, would the action be considered good since God commanded it? I think Abraham reasoned that because he's a good God, this command is good.

And this is something we wrestle with all the time because our culture is telling us different things about what's good. And we can say, look, our God is good. He's proved that on the cross.

He's proved that in many different ways and how he's interacted with us. Even in the circumstance by staying Abraham's hand. So, and then we can look at a command like the commands about our sexuality and say, these are the commands.

I don't understand them. My culture is telling me something completely different, but I know he's a good God, so I know these commands are good. So it's not that God's arbitrary.

God's not arbitrary. He acts within his perfectly good nature. It's not that he can command anything and then it becomes good because he commanded it.

It's that he's a good God. So everything he commands is good and we can reason that it's good because he commanded it. That's an important distinction because there is a philosophical view called the voluntarism, which a thing is good simply in virtue of the command and has unrelated to the moral goodness of God himself from which the command proceeds, at least on Christian theology.

So, I'm glad you made that distinction. Trying to think if there was anything else that I have forgotten, but I've forgotten. So let's go on to the next question.

Oh, there is one. Yes, go ahead. Thank you.

There was one rolling around in my head, too. I think it's ironic that the kind of people, characteristically, who complain about this, are people who say that what was, what appeared to be commanded and was about to happen. With Isaac was immoral, even though those people have no foundation or grounds for claiming anything's moral or immoral to begin with because there are many of these are atheists.

God did this bad thing. Richard Dawkins is an example. The guy who previously wrote, there is no evil, there is no good, there is nothing but blind pitiless indifference.

That's the nature of the world without God. That's the world he affirms, and then he goes and looks at the Bible and says, how evil this God is because look at the kinds of things he does. And my question for Professor Dawkins is simply, where are you getting the moral standard that you're using to judge God by? He's not getting it.

He's not turning the biblical moral standard back on God because the biblical moral standard doesn't condemn God. He is seizing a moral standard from somewhere, but he has no justification for it. Certainly no grounds within his worldview.

So let me just close with this, because what strikes me about this whole story with Abraham, can you imagine trusting God's promise? Because that's what he was doing. God promised that Isaac would be the child of promise and through Isaac he would have countless descendants. Can you imagine trusting God's promises so much that God says, I want you to sacrifice your son and you're going forth in this enterprise because you trust that God said he was going to do this through him and he will.

So he must be planning to raise him from the dead. One way or another, exactly. And we can only pray for that kind of trust.

I mean, this is why he's the father of righteousness by faith. His faith that God would do what he said was so incredible. We can only pray that someday we will trust God that much, that we will live our lives in obedience to God because we trust God.

We trust him that even when it looks like if we do what's right, it's going to hurt us. That we still do what's right. Because we know God's power to raise from the dead.

So if it hurts us, God will redeem that. So it's a great effort. Nicely done, Amy.

So thank you for your questions. We'd love to hear from you on X with the hashtag STRS or go to our website at str.org and send us your question. This is Amy Holland.

Great Coco for a stand to reason.