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If We Can't Impose a Moral Standard from One Period of Time on Another, How Does That Affect the Moral Argument?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about how one can use the moral argument and also say we can't impose a moral standard from one period of time on another and responding to someone who says she would never follow a God who killed his own son.

- * If you say we can't impose a moral standard from one period of time on another, then how does the moral argument fit into this way of thinking?
- * How would you respond to someone who says she would never follow a God who killed his own son?

Transcript

I'm Amy Hall, I'm here with Greg Kockel and welcome to another episode of Stand to Reasons, hashtag S-T-R-S-C-R-S-C podcast. Now, Greg, in the last episode, we talked- You talk so long. 33 minutes, Amy.

Oh my goodness. We went way over, but we didn't get to the second question that's somewhat related to the previous question about grounding objective, rallying God when there's quote, genocide, slavery, and torture. So, if you missed the last episode, you might want to listen to that one first, because we did lay a lot of groundwork that I think might play into this second question.

But this question comes from Kelly. In a recent episode, you spoke about the obliteration of the Canaanites and how we can't impose a moral standard from one period of time on another if the moral standards don't apply. How does the moral argument fit into this way of thinking? Okay, so this is a little bit confused for me.

First of all, the way it was- my point was characterized as not quite the way I recall it. Okay, but I also don't quite understand how the moral argument- with the question about

the moral argument, the moral argument is the argument for God's existence based on the existence of objective morality. And the argument is very simple.

If there is no God, then there is no objective morality. That's the first premise. But there is objective morality.

That's the second premise. And this is demonstrated by the ubiquitous understanding that there's a problem of evil in the world. Okay, everybody knows that.

And the conclusions, therefore, there is a God. Okay, so the real key here is the first one. If there is no God, there is no objective morality.

That, to me, is largely the people try to take exception with it. I'm not sure. I don't understand why.

Because if they believe there's objective morality, they're going to have to show some-give some accounting for how there could be transcendent moral principles or obligations that we are obliged to keep when there is no transcendent moral law. Okay? If there's no government, there are no speed limits. Pretty straightforward.

Okay? But there are speed limits, so therefore there must be a government. It's basically the same kind of argument. And so that's the moral argument for God.

But I'm not sure if that's the argument that Kelly is referring to. But that is the moral argument. What I would understand from this is that Kelly is asking, if you're saying you can't impose a moral standard for one period of time on another, then you've got a changing moral standard.

And if you have a changing moral standard, then how can you say there's objective morality? Okay, so this is another misunderstanding about the nature of objective morality. Objective morality doesn't mean there's one set of rules that apply to every person regardless of the circumstances. Okay? It just means that there is an objective morality that applies to a particular set of circumstances.

It's not subjective, it's not up to the person. So, okay, here's a good, maybe a simple example. Is it wrong to push grandma? Shover.

So she falls over. Yes, that's wrong. Wait a minute.

What if you're shoving grandma out of the way of a motorcycle that's speeding down on her? Then you're shoving her to save her life, not shoving her because you're angry or mean. The action is exactly the same, the shoving. So what this shows is that an action can be objectively morally wrong in one set of circumstances, yet the exact same action can be objective.

Objectively morally obligatory, rescue grandma in another set of circumstances. That

means the moral rule, any moral rule, is always determined by a particular set of circumstances. That's not relativism.

That's objectivism. And that's the case regarding any true statement. Is it true that Greg and Amy are doing the radio show? It is now.

It won't be in two hours. It won't be when you're listening. It won't be when you're listening.

Right. There you go. So that just depends on the nature of the circumstances.

And the same thing with moral principles. They all depend on the nature of the circumstances. Now, some people hold that there are moral absolutes, which can never be adjusted or violated or whatever in any circumstance.

That creates a lot of problems morally for moral thinking if that's your rule. And there's going to be precious few of those things, you know, because there are so many variations in circumstances. You have to make a judgment as to which moral rule applies in this circumstance.

Is the moral rule not to push grandma applying or is the moral rule protect grandma applying? Okay. So that's just to help people to see that different circumstances dictate different moral obligations. All right.

And so when I ask about the Canaanites and how we can't impose our current moral standard on that period of time. Well, for one, I think there's a misunderstanding. A lot depends on what you mean by that.

Oh, I can't think of it. I can't think of it either. But I know it's when you think your the morality of your period of time is supreme and everybody's got to live according to your morality without taking into consideration the circumstances of the time.

Let me use a, I'll think of the phrase that Lewis uses in a moment, but I'll give you a contemporary example. And this is a little bit controversial, but I think most people who are pro-life would rather pass a law that saves 95% of aborted babies' lives, otherwise aborted babies. And it allow for the 5% because they're saving 95%.

That's called an incremental approach. So we make abortion illegal except for incest and rape. So we protect all these babies, even though we're allowing these others babies to be aborted.

But we're not affirming that those abortions are good. We are just trying to incrementally gain a foothold and protect as many babies as possible. Okay.

Now, not everybody agrees with this. They say it's all or nothing. And in my view, that means you'd rather sacrifice 95% of these babies with, by opposing this law, just

because you can't save them all.

We see a similar kind of thing in scripture. We see evil men being restrained by God. Okay.

It's Lewis's phrase is something like the arrogance of the present or something like that, the arrogance of the present. Anyway, Amy will figure it out and she'll put it in the show notes later. But the, the, the, the, the point is that God is working with a deeply fallen world.

And, and he is, he is doing an incremental job, so to speak and restricting what can be restricted. And, and that's, that's the wisdom that he's offering. So for us to demand that, that our, in a sense, enlightened morality be required of civilizations that were existed 3,000 years ago is, is, is, is an unrealistic.

God is trying to improve on the circumstances. And he's doing that with the laws, even though the laws don't obliterate all of the injustice. And I'm back to Jesus comment about God allowing divorce because the hardness of Ben's heart.

Yeah, yeah, you can't miss the fact that yes, we might have different standards now, but as you mentioned, this has, God has been incrementally working on society. You, a society's laws can be closer or farther away from God's ideal. So we're not saying, Oh, well, you can have this one standard here and this one standard there and they're both equally valid.

No, that the laws might be closer or farther away from God's ideal. And I think in a lot of ways we've moved closer to God's ideal and then some ways we moved away from God's ideal. But the point is the laws don't always reflect the ideal.

And I think this is hard for people to understand. The mosaic law did not always reflect God's ideal. And we know this because Jesus said it didn't.

He says it in Matthew 19. He says, yes, the law made a provision for divorce, as you said, Greg. But that's not the way it was meant to be.

It's only as a way to govern our heart and hearts. Now, so if you say you apply this to slavery, God's governing the heart and hearts. He's governing the world that exists at the time.

He's improving the lot of the slaves. He's making all these laws to protect them. And at this point in time, we've moved closer to the ideal in the society and there's not legal slavery and our laws reflect that.

So our laws have moved closer to God's ideal, but they wouldn't have worked back then because of the way the world was at the time. And so hopefully that'll help you think

about kind of how all these things play together. What I'm not saying is that things that were immoral today were moral then.

I'm not saying that. I'm not changing. And you made this point, but I'm just underscoring it.

I'm not saying that. Well, they had their standard. We have our standard.

That would be relativistic. Culture changes. But there is an increasing sensitivity now to the broader moral requirements of civilization that wasn't in place then.

And God was dealing with those people then, and he's dealing with us now. It's a very different set of circumstances. The bad news is we're probably still pretty far away from God's ideal and we don't realize.

You know, if it's unclear how our society is going to move towards our way from God at this point, but let's say in 200 years, let's say God brings about this massive revival. And he moves us closer to his ideal and they look back at this time and they think we're complete barbarians. I mean, we can look back.

Just look at the abortion rate. I mean, just look at that. Oh, yeah, deaf? Yes.

Being on the wrong side of history. Look at this labor issue. Well, look just a hundred years ago to eugenics.

I mean, there are all sorts of things that are changing over time where our laws are hopefully going to move closer to the ideal, but they don't always. So maybe you would look back and think, OK, that person, I'm not going to totally discount this person who was caught up into this cultural understanding of X, Y, or Z. That doesn't mean that it was moral. It just means we understand they didn't get that at the time.

OK, hopefully that's helpful to you, Kelly. Let's go into a question from Aaron. How do you respond to someone who says she would never follow a God who killed his own son? Well, I would want, this is another area I think where there's confusion and where there's a lack of theological understanding of what's going on.

There's also a low Christology. This is where it's required to have some theological things in place for this whole thing to make sense. It's interesting when you look at the record, there's a couple of things that the record indicates about the death of Jesus.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. God didn't kill Jesus. The Romans killed Jesus at the hand of the Jews.

And by the way, that is at the hand of the Jews is very clear from the biblical record in multiple places, not just in this one statement let his blood be on our head. You have the whole record there, and it's really clear that Caesar, not Caesar, but Pontius Pilate, did

not want to execute Jesus, tried to get him off. But nevertheless, I'm just as a point of information.

It was the Jews at the Pentecost Sunday, the sermon that Peter gave. He said, this Jesus whom you crucified, he speaking to the Jews. Now it was the Romans that put him on the cross, but it was the Jews that had him killed.

So the Jewish leadership that arranged for that to take place. So human beings who killed Jesus, first of all. Now God made a provision in his plan to use the death of Jesus in a certain way.

And it wasn't that God just let the Jews kill him and crucify him, something else is going on on the cross. God was pouring out his wrath on Jesus. Okay, but it's interesting that, I mean, if you want to strain at that's here, Jesus said, it is finished before he died.

So I'm, you know, you could strain at this. Well, God did kill Jesus. Men killed Jesus.

God poured his wrath out on Jesus for a reason. He gave his son. But Jesus also said, nobody takes my life from me.

I give it up of my own accord. Jesus volunteered for this. Now, why would somebody volunteer for a suicide mission? I'm thinking in modern terms, people like to watch military stuff or whatever.

You know, I remember seeing Black Hawk down, very Ridley Scott, very intense military movie. Guys like me like that kind of stuff, you know, even though it kind of has a bad ending because it actually is rooted in an historical event. There were two guys that went, they were after the chopper went down in the midst of this melee and the good guys are trapped and getting killed.

There were two guys in chopper that went in to rescue them. And those two guys knew they were not coming back. If you saw the movie, this is where they didn't come back.

So this is really clear. They're going to go in to attempt the impossible and they're going to probably die in the process. And they knew this.

Why were they sacrificing their life? Because on the outside chance, they could rescue life. They were willing to surrender their life for the benefit of someone else. This is what Jesus was doing.

He was willing to engage in a suicide mission because something great would come out of it. And this New Testament theology is thick with this. The restoration of the world to God, the defeat of the problem of evil, the destruction of the enemy, the end of death.

All of these things were the good result of Jesus' death on a cross. So when people say, I can't believe it in God who would kill his son, they're putting this in the most vacuous

and negative way possible. The father and the son agreed on a way that the world would be saved and the problem of evil would be resolved.

But it required a sacrifice that the son was willing to make. And he came to earth for the reason of making that sacrifice. Hebrews 10, sacrifice and burn offering you have not desired but a body you have prepared for me.

And the introductory line in that section says, And when he came into the world, he said, You prepared a body for me. Behold, I have come to do your will. And that was to rescue humankind from the guilt of their sin but ultimately to rescue the world from the effects of sin.

Okay, and that comes second. So all of these magnificent things were the consequence of the good plan that the father made with the son with the son's approval so that the son would pay and suffer to rescue the many. All right, and one last detail this has to do with theology.

It wasn't one guy beaten up on another guy because if that were the case, how is it an example of God's love that he gave his son for the salvation of the world? The son was also God. God gave himself. In fact, I don't remember the exact passage but it talks about the passage and the New Testament talks about God bleeding for the sins of the people.

When did God bleed on a Roman cross? So in this case, it was God sacrificing himself because Jesus was God the son. So this goes back once again to what we talked about on the previous episode where you have to evaluate Christianity based on what it actually says. And clearly saying just saying God killed his own son, there are all sorts of ideas there that have nothing to do with Christianity.

I mean, this is the beautiful core of Christianity that has built civilizations that has created art forms and music and architecture and amazing beauty because of the beauty of the story. And this is how they're characterizing it. It's just so ridiculous.

By the way, this reminds me and I can't think of the, it's all holding night, the Christmas carol. There's a line in there about slavery because the slave is our brother. It's talking about Jesus coming to get rid of injustice and then it uses slavery as an example of injustice.

You know, this is all holding night. You can find it as one of the passages, one of the verses, stanzas or whatever they call it, music. So because this is the core and beauty of Christianity and the grace of God and the giving and the self sacrifice, this is the most beautiful part of Christianity.

So one thing you might want to do, this just occurred to me, maybe you could say, okay, well, would this be a better story? Would this be a better story for Christianity? So let's

look at Philippians two. Oh, just think of it as a passage. Have this attitude in yourselves, which was also in Christ Jesus, who, because he existed in the form of God, regarded equality with God, something to be grasped and refused to empty himself or take on the form of a bondservant or be made in the likeness of men, he did not humble himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

So is that a better story? Just so nobody missed it, Amy just negated all the affirmations in that passage, right? Yes, that's what Christianity would be if God did not kill his own son. Right. And there'd be no grounds for forgiveness.

There would be no forgiveness. There would be no grace. There's no self sacrifice.

There's no God does not. The whole love is defined in the New Testament. The ultimate definition is Jesus dying on a cross for us, giving himself for us.

For God so loved the world in this way he loved. This is the manner in which he demonstrated love. And this is love, not that we love God, but that he loved us and sent his son to die for us.

This is the story that changed humanity. So is this what I just read? Is that a better story? Really? That's what you're asking. That's inspiring to you.

By the way, you mentioned scripture, but there's another book that comes to mind that people might read that would help them to understand this detail a little bit more clearly. I don't know. Does any title exist? Could it be the story of reality graphs? That's it.

That's right there at the tip of my tongue. But I go into detail on this to help people see the elegance of the story, which entails the death of Jesus and that this is the rescue plan. This is the way man can't rescue himself.

He's not capable of doing that. And so what God does is he initiates a rescue plan by becoming a human being himself and doing what's necessary to rescue mankind. Not just mankind from their sin, but the entire creation from his corruption.

And, you know, Greg, you mentioned that the Jews wanted Jesus to be put to death. I mean, less people say that because of that, we should hate them. I mean, that is the most ridiculous response.

It's because those were Jesus's people. And so that's where we're seeing this play out. The evil of humanity is what led to the death of Jesus.

It's not the evil of the Jews in particular. In fact, Jesus died for all of us. That's the big point.

And the gospel is to go to the Jew first and then to Gentile and Paul there in Romans 10 is saying, I bear them witness. They have a zeal for God. My prayer and constant prayer

for them is for their salvation.

So you don't see this anti-Semitic understanding played out in the New Testament. Though some people have used that to capitalize. Not at all, but what we do see.

And this is what God is illustrating throughout the whole Old Testament with giving them the law. And by the way, the Bible also says they're loved on account of the patriarchs. And they're the ones who received the promises.

They're the ones who were chosen by God. All the Romans, of course. But what we what we learn from God giving them the law.

And still, that wasn't enough because they weren't able to follow the law because of sin. Not because they're Jews, but because they're human. So that is what that is what God was illustrating our need for Christ.

Because, you know, at the beginning, Adam fell. So God gives them a law and the law doesn't save them. They cannot follow the law because our sin is too strong.

And so now we come to the death of Christ which saves all of us. And so God has revealed through the Jews not only his goodness through the law and his goodness through the way he interacted with all of their prophets and his judgments against evil. But now he's brought through them the Messiah who dies.

And because of that can offer us grace, which is better than the law because now the Holy Spirit gives us the power to kill our sin. So it's just it is a beautiful story that God has been working. And so read your Bible.

And to reduce it all to God killed his son is to put it in the most vulgar terms possible. And also as such a radical distortion of what's going on. I wish we had more.

I wish we had beautiful cathedrals that we could just take this person to and say, look, does what you just say? Does it seem like something that when inspired this? How what is bearing the weight of this beauty? It's not the way you're characterizing it. So you're missing something. Aren't you curious about what you're missing here? Yeah.

Why do people wear crosses? Either crucifixes or bear crosses, you know, either way. There's a celebration here that's going on because they understand it very differently than you do. And what what what troubles me a little bit with a challenge like this? Of course, I wasn't there when it was asked and I understand how people might ask it.

But most of the time I've encountered this, progressives lay this out. They call it a cosmic child abuse, progressive Christians. A cosmic child abuse is that they're they're they're kind of they're trying to express it in a way that sullies what's being done without giving any of all people progressive Christians ought to know at least how the story

characterizes the death of Christ.

They ought to know that they can reject it if they want. But to reject it on the grounds that this is divine child abuse, this isn't child abuse. Is this God dying shedding his own blood for us to rescue us? Now, maybe Christians are mistaken in their theology, but please understand the theology well enough at least to not mischaracterize it in this vulgar fashion.

Well, I could go on now that you've brought up some of it, but I'm going to end it there because we're already a few minutes over. But we thank you Kelly and Aaron for your questions. If you have a question, send it to us on X with the hashtag STRask or you can go to our website at STR.org. All you need to do is look for our hashtag STRask podcast page and you'll find a link there.

So send us your questions. We'd love to hear from you. This is Amy Hall and Greg Coco for Stand to Reason.