

Theological Equipping Class

Does God command evil acts? | February 23, 2020

Introduction

Important Theological Nuances

1. God can ordain that which He hates.

Will of decree: hidden sovereign will | Will of command: revealed moral will

Examples:

- Hates oppression of His people (moral)...but ordains that they be oppressed in Egypt.
- He commands Pharaoh to let His people go...but hardens his heart so that he won't.
- Desires all to be saved...but effectually calls only some.
- Hates the slaughter of His Son...but also wills it to happen.

God ordains sin, but doesn't command sin. God can ordain sin, but not Himself be guilty of that sin.

2. God stands behind good and evil differently.

He stands behind good directly, but behind evil indirectly. He **does** good, He **uses** evil.

When God uses evil, it is always FOR good. Even if we don't know what that good is.

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. (Genesis 50:20)

Joseph: what evil did he experience?

How did that bring about good?

Jesus: What evil did He experience?

What good did that bring about?

this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. (Acts 2:23)

for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. (Acts 4:27-28)

3. **The fact that the Bible records something doesn't mean that God approves of that thing.**

Examples: incest, murder, rape, etc.

Is polygamy sinful?

- From the beginning God created marriage as 2 persons joined in 1 flesh.
 - Polygamy and divorce: permitted, but not condoned
- Requirements of elders & deacons. "Husband of one wife"
- Results: notice the narrative around polygamy.
- Marriage as a picture of the gospel: any distortion of marriage distorts the image of the gospel.

The Bible records many acts that God hates so we can't say that just because the Bible records it or regulates it or doesn't explicitly condemn it that it is therefore morally good.

4. **God determines what is and is not evil.**

Beware of imposing on the text.

Presuppositions

- If homosexuality is acceptable, then God will definitely seem capricious or cruel at best when He condemns it!
- If all killing is murder and thus all killing is evil, then the conquest of Canaan is immoral and God commands evil and thus God is evil.

BUT not all killing is murder. All murder is killing, but not all killing is murder.

The problem with presuppositions

How could God command Abraham to sacrifice Isaac?

God hates child sacrifice.

- *You shall not give any of your children to offer them to Molech, and so profane the name of your God: I am the Lord. (Leviticus 18:21)*
- *There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer (Deuteronomy 18:10)*

- *You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way, for every abominable thing that the Lord hates they have done for their gods, for they even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods. (Deuteronomy 12:31)*

So if God hates child sacrifice then how does God command Abraham to sacrifice his child?

When God commands Abraham to sacrifice Isaac there are only 2 logical outcomes.

- Abraham could have refused. In which case he doesn't sacrifice Isaac.
- He could have obeyed, as he did, in which case God would have intervened, which he did.
- In neither outcome was Isaac actually sacrificed or endangered.

Does God condone rape?

The Bible recording something doesn't mean that it approves of it.

But how do we deal with Deuteronomy 22:28-29?

If a man meets a virgin who is not betrothed, and seizes her and lies with her, and they are found, then the man who lay with her shall give to the father of the young woman fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife, because he has violated her. He may not divorce her all his days. (Deuteronomy 22:28-29)

Look at the context!

- *If there is a betrothed virgin, and a man meets her in the city and lies with her, then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them to death with stones, the young woman because she did not cry for help though she was in the city, and the man because he violated his neighbor's wife. So you shall purge the evil from your midst. (vss. 23-24)*
- *But if in the open country a man meets a young woman who is betrothed, & the man seizes [heheziq] her & lies with her, then only the man who lay with her shall die. But you shall do nothing to the young woman; she has committed no offense punishable by death. For this case is like that of a man attacking & murdering his neighbor, because he met her in the open country, & though the betrothed young woman cried for help there was no one to rescue her. (vss. 25-27)*
- *If a man meets a virgin who is not betrothed, and seizes [tepesa] her and lies with her, and they are found, then the man who lay with her shall give to the father of the young woman fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife, because he has violated her. He may not divorce her all his days. (vss. 28-29)*

Three different cases in this passage with different prescriptions for each.

- The first (23-24) deals with a consensual activity

- The second (25-27) is obviously sexual assault
- What about the third? (28-29)

Hints in the text?

- The word for seizes is a different word in vs. 28 than it was in vs. 25.
- "and they are found"

Three scenarios in the three passages: adultery, rape, and premarital sex!

What about the phrase he violated her?

If a man seduces a virgin who is not betrothed and lies with her, he shall give the bride-price for her and make her his wife. (Exodus 22:16)

Ironically, those who use Dt. 22:28-29 as evidence that the Bible condones rape, not only rely on a passage that isn't about rape at all, but also skip over a passage that very clearly condemns rape just two verses earlier!

What are we to make of genocide in the Old Testament, particularly, the Canaanite invasion?

"The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving, control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capricious malevolent bully." Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*

When the Lord your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations more numerous and mightier than you, and when the Lord your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction. You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them. You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the Lord would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly. But thus shall you deal with them: you shall break down their altars and dash in pieces their pillars and chop down their Asherim and burn their carved images with fire. (Deuteronomy 7:1-5)

So is this genocide? Is this murder? Does God command sin?

Is the slaughter as absolute as it appears?

Noted exceptions: for instance, Rahab and her family, the Gibeonites, people from other surrounding territories.

Is this genocide or murder? Or capital punishment?

"not every killing is murder"

it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is driving them out before you.
(Deuteronomy 9:4-6)

You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way, for every abominable thing that the Lord hates they have done for their gods, for they even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods.
(Deuteronomy 12:31)

The objection is really to the idea of God having the right to judge & punish the wicked !

God's mercy and patience.

And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete. (Genesis 15:16)

Why does the Bible condone slavery?

A couple things to keep in mind:

- Regulation of something doesn't necessarily imply approval of that thing.
- God doesn't command slavery. "Why doesn't the Bible condemn slavery" is different than "why does God command slavery."

Why doesn't God condemn slavery?

Define our terms. What do we mean by slavery?

When we think of slavery, we think of one of two things: the modern sex trade or 19th century antebellum slavery

Roman slavery

- generally wasn't ethnic or race based
- education of slaves was generally encouraged
- slavery was not the bottom rung of society. Many poor people sold themselves into slavery in order to move UP the social ladder.
- Slaves could generally own property, including funds to purchase their own freedom
- A large percentage of slaves could anticipate being manumitted (set free) by age 30
- Ex-slaves often became citizens, some even rising to govern (Roman governor Marcus Antonius Felix - Acts - was a slave until freed by emperor Claudius' mother)

Every form of modern slavery that we tend to think of is explicitly condemned in Scripture.

- *Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death.* (Exodus 21:16)
- *If a man is found stealing one of his brothers of the people of Israel, and if he treats him as a slave or sells him, then that thief shall die. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.* (Deuteronomy 24:7)
- *the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine,* (1 Timothy 1:10) (literally man stealers)
- *You shall not give up to his master a slave who has escaped from his master to you.* (Deuteronomy 23:15) (vs. Fugitive Slave Act of 1850)

Every single abuse that we consider within modern slavery is explicitly condemned in Scripture.

- Not to threaten (Eph 5:9)
- Treat justly and fairly (Col 4:1)
- All of the other commandments about love, grace, kindness, patience, etc.

Slavery itself as an institution, is not condemned. Why not?

Conceptually: we're all slaves in a sense.

Should we give in to "cancel culture" when it comes to slavery?

Example: Jonathan Edwards

He wrote against the cruelty of the slave trade.
 He argued for the spiritual equality of the races.
 Open membership in Northhampton congregation
 He served as a missionary to Native American.

Did Edwards sin in owning slaves or did he submit to Scripture in regards to slavery?

What's at stake? Sufficiency!!!

Contextually: would it have been loving and kind to release all slaves?

- Slaves who were freed under the age of 30 years old could not be granted citizenship & could only be freed through a formal legal process (*Lex Aelia Sentia* – 4AD).
- There were limits to the number of slaves that 1 could free. A master who had 3 slaves could free only 2; those who had between 4 & 10 could free only half of them; those with 11 to 30 could free only a 1/3, & so on (*Lex Fufia Caninia* – 2BC)
- An exercise in understanding and ethics.

Summary:

- Is modern slavery evil?

- Were some ancient slave owners evil?
- But are there good and godly reasons for the Bible itself to not immediately command masters to release their slaves?
- Have some used the Bible to support unjust and wicked forms of evil?
- Were those who used the Bible to support race-based American slavery wrong?
- But is all slavery in all times and in all ways always evil?
- Should we dismiss everyone in the past who owned slaves simply BECAUSE they owned slaves?