“If Child Sacrifice Is Sinful, Why Did God Require It of Abraham?”

According to Deut 18:10-12, “Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire…” OK, so at least as far back as Moses’ time, human sacrifice was wrong – sinful.

But…why then would God test Abraham by asking him to make a human sacrifice of Isaac? It seems to me that God is asking him to do something sinful to prove his obedience and devotion. That goes against God’s character, doesn’t it?

Thanks for your question. Much has been written about Gen. 22. Let me mention a few important points and refer you to some more extensive answers.

First, notice Gen. 22:5: “So he said to his servants, You two stay here with the donkey while the boy and I go up there. We will worship and then return to you.

The NET Bible comments, “It is impossible to know what Abraham was thinking when he said, We will. . .return to you.” When he went he knew (1) that he was to sacrifice Isaac, and (2) that God intended to fulfill his earlier promises through Isaac. How he reconciled those facts is not clear in the text. Heb 11:17-19 suggests that Abraham believed God could restore Isaac to him through resurrection.”

Second, notice vv. 7-8, “Isaac said to his father Abraham, My father? What is it, my son? he replied. Here is the fire and the wood, Isaac said, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering? 22:8 God will provide for himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son, Abraham replied. The two of them continued on together.”

Again, the NET Bible comments, "*God will provide* is the central theme of the passage and the turning point in the story. Note Pauls allusion to the story in Rom 8:32 (how shall he not freely give us all things?)" (See http://www.bible.org/netbible/gen22_notes.htm).

Finally, we must remember that God never allowed Abraham to actually carry out the sacrifice. God never intended that he actually sacrifice his son. He apparently intended to test Abraham's faith in, and love for, God. It's a radical test, to be sure, but one which God never intended for Abraham to actually carry out.

For more information, please visit:

1. www.tektonics.org/gk/humansac.html
2. www.christian-thinktank.com/qkilisak.html
3. www.tektonics.org/whatis/whatfaith.html

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

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"What About Household Salvation?"

What is your view on Household Salvation? (I am thinking of two scriptures: Acts 11:14–"…and he will speak words to you by which you will be saved, you and all your household" and Acts 16:31–"They said, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.'")

Thanks for your letter. My view on Household Salvation is that each member of the household, upon hearing the Gospel message, can be saved on the one condition of personal faith in Christ. Acts 11:14 MAY be predictive (i.e. predicting that everyone in the household would respond positively to the Gospel with personal faith in Christ). Acts 16:31 makes it clear that personal faith is the necessary condition for salvation. I think this verse is just a shorthand way of saying that whoever believes can likewise be saved. To hold that an entire household could be saved on the basis of one member's faith in Christ would flatly contradict all the New Testament passages that speak of the necessity of personal faith in Christ for salvation.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

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"Is It Judging Others to Call Them Evil?"

Is it judging others to call them evil? For example, if someone rapes children, is it OK to say that person is evil unless he/she repents? Or is that judging others?

There is little to gain by referring to individuals as "evil" whether it is spoken directly to someone or just thought to yourself. Calling someone evil would certainly be considered inflammatory. The concept of evil is sometimes unnecessarily avoided or swept under the rug in our culture. However,

calling someone evil rather than referring to their actions as evil is probably not necessary in most cases. Ultimately, sin is sin and everyone is capable of great evil. The example you gave, rape, is certainly evil and the one who commits such an act could properly be referred to as evil. There are no "little sins" in God's sight, however, so the liar and glutton could also be called evil. So, no, it is not wrong to refer to someone as evil but it will probably prove counter-productive to actually call someone evil. A less inflammatory approach would be better.

If you do a word search for evil, you will find that the Lord Jesus did not hesitate to call some men evil if that's what they were. But then, He had the right to judge the thoughts and intentions of their hearts, being God and being informed by the Holy Spirit. Interestingly, the apostle Paul is the only NT writer who calls men evil, and that only occurs twice—and neither time is he referring to specific individuals. The rest of the time the NT writers talk about evil as a force and a chosen behavior, and the evil one (Satan). Given this perspective, we believe it would be wiser to rephrase the judgment of evil as applying to the beliefs and actions rather than calling an individual evil.

Sue Bohlin

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"What Advice Would You Give Someone Leaving an Abusive

Church?”

We now realize that our church is abusive. What advice can you give us?

I would advise you read a few books that will help during the difficult transition. *Recovering from Churches that Abuse* by Ron Enroth, *Healing Spiritual Abuse* by Ken Blue, and *The Grace Awakening* by Charles Swindoll. Often, there is a lot of hurt and bitterness. These books can help you overcome the pain and keep from becoming a bitter individual.

Second, I would advise you join a support group from a good church. There are very few support groups for spiritually abused victims but if you can find one, great. If not, a group to share your experience and pray with is a great help.

Third, many abused victims want to inform members who remain at the abusive church. This can be very frustrating and time consuming. I do not recomend spending a lot of your energy doing this. It is best to leave it all behind and begin a new chapter in your life.

Finally, enjoy your new freedom. Visit churches and fellowships. You will realize that the body of Christ is a lot bigger than you can imagine and this is refreshing to see. In the process, you will meet a lot of neat Christians who may become your new family in Christ.

Patrick Zukeran

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“What’s Dominionism?”

Mr. Anderson:

I heard you say on Point of View that your guest, Craig Parshall, can speak on many issues. You were talking about that PBS person, Bill Moyers.

What’s this “dominionism” thing? I went to Wikipedia and it doesn’t sound like anything a true follower of Christ Jesus would want to be involved with.

I noticed that the May 2005 issue of *Harpers* magazine that Craig Parshall was talking about on the program actually used the term dominionism. I really think the authors in that magazine article and in the Wikipedia entry are misusing the term.

Dominion theology defines a small group of postmillennial Christians who are part of the Christian Reconstruction movement. They are trying to bring about God’s kingdom on earth through government, societies, and cultures. That would not describe the theology or agenda of the members of the National Religious Broadcasters or the National Association of Evangelicals.

In fact, I can’t think of a single prominent leader in either of these organizations that would hold to that theological position. Perhaps there is one that I don’t know about, but it certainly does not describe the theology of NRB or NAE.

To put it simply, I don’t think the term “dominionist” in the magazine or even in the Wikipedia entry is a fair description of the evangelical leadership in America.

Thanks for writing.

Kerby Anderson

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“Why Was God Sorry He Made Man?”

***“Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He created man on the earth and He was grieved in His heart.”*(Gen. 6:5&6 NKJV)**

When I read this passage three things stood out to me and seemed contradictory to everything that I have been told about God and have read in other parts of the Bible.

1) God is perfect and infallible. Why then was He “sorry that He created man”? In my mind “sorry” indicates some admission of error.

2) God is pure good. The Word says that all things were created through Him (*logos* the Word) and there is nothing that exists on the earth which He did not create (my summation of John 1). Therefore evil exists, but who created evil: Satan or Lucifer? In my understanding he is the author of rebellion and all kinds of “evil.” OK, so who created Lucifer who is later called “adversary”? Well, God did. The universe and in fact all reality was conceived by God and given life by the Word (please correct if I am wrong, I truly want to believe). So evil had to have been conceived first by God in order for Lucifer to have the ability to rebel. Follow? Nothing exists that God did not create.

3) God is omniscient. If God created time and knows all then

why did he create man when He knew man would turn their hearts to evil? Taking that thinking further, why did he make Lucifer knowing he would rebel? Therefore, why did God create rebellion?

The term “sorry” doesn’t necessarily carry the connotation of admitting to an error. For instance, I can be “sorry” that a good friend has been stricken with a terminal illness. But this doesn’t mean I’m taking responsibility for the illness, or that I’ve committed an error of some kind. Similarly, God was “sorry” and “grieved” by man’s wickedness (to continue our analogy, the “illness” of sin). But God was not directly responsible for this wickedness rather, man was responsible. God created man in His image and endowed him with genuine libertarian freedom. Thus, man not only had the freedom to do good, he also had the freedom to do evil. Unfortunately, man exercised his will to do what was evil in God’s sight. Hence, God was “sorry” that he made man. But the evil was not done by God, but by man whom God had created with genuine freedom (part of “the image of God”).

It’s true that no “thing” exists which God did not create. But most philosophers and theologians do not consider evil to be a “thing” (i.e. something which exists in its own right). Rather, moral evil is a corruption, perversion, or defect in some good thing created by God. Everything created by God was good. Moral evil entered the picture when the angel now known as Satan freely chose to exercise his will in defiance of God. This angel was created good, not evil. But he chose to do evil, and he did this freely. God did not force him to sin, or tempt him, or anything of the sort. Satan freely chose to rebel against God and was thus corrupted by sin. I personally think the fall of Satan is described in Ezekiel 28:11-19 (for reasons that I don’t have time to get into here).

I think it’s a mistake to say that God created rebellion. God did not create rebellion. Rather, God made rational moral agents (like humans and angels) and endowed them with genuine

moral freedom (which necessitates the genuine freedom to do good and/or evil). God's creatures some of them, at any rate chose evil. God did not. Of course, God knew the creatures would choose evil. So why did He create them? Apparently, He considered it worthwhile to create such free creatures even knowing ahead of time that they would sin. He provided a means, at His own expense, for man to be redeemed and saved from his sins. Satan and the demons will simply be destroyed.

At any rate, it's important to assign blame to whom it is due. God created free creatures and thus the possibility of moral evil. But it was the creatures themselves, not God, who actualized this possibility by freely choosing moral evil. God did not tempt them to sin, nor did He force them to sin. They freely chose to sin.

Hope this helps. By the way, an excellent website which you may want to visit is bible.org. They have thousands of helpful resources for studying the Bible.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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"What's the Difference Between Moral Relativism and Pluralism?"

Moral relativism and pluralism: I said they are, in effect, the same. The Unitarian academics smiled and suggested that I am unlearned on the topic. What say you?

The two terms are not necessarily linked. One could be a moral relativist and an atheist, which isn't quite the same as a religious pluralist. Theologian John Hick is an example of a religious pluralist who accepts all major world religions as viable paths to what he calls the "Other." However, he would reject the label of moral relativist, claiming that these belief systems cause followers to seek a good beyond themselves and that this lends to their behavior a certain ethical dimension not found in unbelievers.

The problem with John Hick's system is in its rejection of what these religious systems claim to believe about salvation and humanity's destiny in order to blend them into his pluralistic system. Harold Netland has written a helpful book for thinking through the problems of religious pluralism called *Dissonant Voices*.

For Him,

Don Closson
Probe Ministries

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"How Do You Answer the Claim That Jesus Was 100% Man Emptying Himself of God?"

I recently heard a pastor speak about some things that really bothered me. First, he said that Jesus was 100 percent man that emptied himself of God. He said that the miracle of God becoming man would not be taken away if you do not believe

this. His term was, "Jesus was 100% man that was God." He also threw in the comment that Jesus and the Father are one, not as in the Trinity but that Jesus was God and for instance in the garden when He was praying, He was praying to Himself. He also believed that in the temple when Jesus was young, when it says he grew in wisdom and stature that means he was learning, hence that he did not know everything.

Secondly—he does not believe that the serpent in the garden was Satan. He actually seemed that he didn't believe that there is a Satan. He used the meaning of Satan as tempter and not an actual creature. This has really been bothering me and I would like your answers and some advice in where to study this myself.

Thanks for your letter. It sounds like you have some good reasons to be concerned about the pastor. The orthodox doctrine of Christ holds that Jesus was fully God and fully man. He was not a man who "emptied Himself" of God, for in that case He would no longer be divine. What Philippians 2:5-11 rather tells us, I think, is that He "emptied Himself" by becoming human and temporarily (and voluntarily) giving up the independent exercise of His divine attributes. Jesus was fully God, but He voluntarily submitted, for a limited time, to a limitation in the independent exercise of His divine attributes (e.g. omniscience, omnipresence, etc.). Jesus could still exercise these attributes, but only insofar as it was consistent with the Father's will during His earthly sojourn. This, I think, is a better explanation of Philippians 2:5-11.

A good analogy is to imagine the world's fastest sprinter running in a three-legged race. He would voluntarily restrict and limit himself for a time, but even while running much more slowly than he was capable of, he never stops being the world's fastest sprinter. Jesus never stopped being divine even while He voluntarily limited Himself concerning His omniscience, His omnipresence, His omnipotence, etc.

In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed to the Father. Christian orthodoxy believes in the Trinity. God is one in essence, but subsists as three distinct Persons. The Father is not the Son and neither are the Holy Spirit. Rather, each is a distinct Person, but all share mysteriously in the One divine essence. This pastor sounds like he rejects Trinitarianism, or holds to some form of what is known as "modalism." Some people have described modalism as "the swapping hats" theory: God swaps out the Father hat for the Son hat or the Holy Spirit hat, depending on who He wants to "be" at any given moment. According to orthodox Christianity, rejecting the Trinity or embracing modalism are heretical viewpoints.

Your pastor is correct, however, to say that Jesus grew in knowledge. But He did so as a human being. As God, He is all-knowing. However, as I said above, in the incarnation Jesus voluntarily surrendered the independent exercise of His divine attributes. Jesus Himself confessed that there were some things that He did not know during His time on earth; see Mark 13:32; etc.

Finally, while it is certainly true that Genesis 3 does not identify the serpent with Satan, this identification does seem to be made explicitly in Revelation 12:9. Also, a careful study of what the Bible teaches about Satan reveals that personal attributes are consistently applied to him. The Bible views Satan as a personal being, not as a metaphor for temptation, etc.

Hope this helps a bit. If you would like more information about biblical and theological issues, please visit The Biblical Studies Foundation website at Netbible.org. They have lots of great information about the Bible.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

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“The Bible Has Been Changed and Corrupted Over Time”

You Bible-thumping Christians are so deluded and stupid. The Bible has been so changed and translated and mistranslated over time that it can’t be trusted. Didn’t you play the telephone game when you were a kid? Whatever the first person whispered to the second person, is going to be very different from what the last person hears. Stop acting as if you have all the answers—your Bible is a book of myths.

You’re in good company; a lot of people think that way because they simply don’t know the facts about how trustworthy the Bible really is. When you find out the truth about how the Bible has been handed down from one generation to the next, your charge will have as much significance as proclaiming that courts have no basis for determining the constitutionality of issues since the Constitution was written so long ago we can’t know what it originally said.

But we can go back to the original Constitution and check, right?

We don’t have the original biblical documents, but we have the next best thing: thousands of copies of the original New Testament manuscripts, by which we can determine what *was* originally said. The Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts (www.csntm.org) tells me that the current number is about 5500 copies of just the Greek New Testament, and when we combine the Greek with all translations in the various languages before the printing press was invented, there are a staggering 15,000 copies of NT manuscripts in existence, with more being found every day!

Greg Koukl of Stand to Reason (www.str.org) helps illustrate how Bible scientists (the discipline of textual criticism) can assure us of the Bible's accuracy:

RECONSTRUCTING AUNT SALLY'S LETTER

Pretend your Aunt Sally learns in a dream the recipe for an elixir that preserves her youth. When she wakes up, she scribbles the directions on a scrap of paper, then runs to the kitchen to make up her first glass. In a few days Aunt Sally is transformed into a picture of radiant youth because of her daily dose of "Sally's Secret Sauce."

Aunt Sally is so excited she sends detailed, hand-written instructions on how to make the sauce to her three bridge partners (Aunt Sally is still in the technological dark ages—no photocopier or email). They, in turn, make copies for ten of their own friends.

All goes well until one day Aunt Sally's pet schnauzer eats the original copy of the recipe. In a panic she contacts her three friends who have mysteriously suffered similar mishaps, so the alarm goes out to the others in attempt to recover the original wording.

Sally rounds up all the surviving hand-written copies, twenty-six in all. When she spreads them out on the kitchen table, she immediately notices some differences. Twenty-three of the copies are exactly the same. Of the remaining three, however, one has misspelled words, another has two phrases inverted ("mix then chop" instead of "chop then mix") and one includes an ingredient none of the others has on its list.

Do you think Aunt Sally can accurately reconstruct her original recipe from this evidence? Of course she can. The misspellings are obvious errors. The single inverted phrase stands out and can easily be repaired. Sally would then strike the extra ingredient, reasoning it's more plausible

> one person would add an item in error than 25 people would accidentally omit it.
>
> Even if the variations were more numerous or more diverse, the original could still be reconstructed with a high level of confidence if Sally had enough copies.
>
> This, in simplified form, is how scholars do "textual criticism," an academic method used to test all documents of antiquity, not just religious texts. It's not a haphazard effort based on hopes and guesses; it's a careful linguistic process allowing an alert critic to determine the extent of possible corruption of any work.{1}

When the thousands of copies of manuscripts (far more than for any other document of antiquity) are compared, we can know that the New Testament is 99.5% textually pure. In the entire text of 20,000 lines, only 40 lines are in doubt (about 400 words), and none affects any significant doctrine.{2}

Even if all the manuscripts in the whole world were to disappear, the New Testament is so comprehensively quoted by early church letters, essays and other extra-biblical sources that we could still reconstruct almost the entire testament.

We have a much fuller explanation of this in our article "Are the Biblical Documents Reliable?" at www.probe.org/are-the-biblical-documents-reliable

The historical evidence for the reliability of the biblical documents is so great that we can rest assured that the Bible we read today is the same Bible that God intended for us to have from the very beginning.

Wishing you well,

Sue Bohlin

Probe Ministries

Notes

1. Greg Koukl, *Solid Ground*, Jan/Feb 2005, Stand to Reason.

2. Norman Geisler and William Nix, *The Text of the New Testament* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 475.