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Doctrinal and Moral Problems

Certain questions surface when we consider some of the doctrinal and ethical statements of the Bible. In most instances these are readily solved when we fully understand what the Bible actually says. In other instances, however, the difficulty arises when a critic of Scripture simply does not agree with the ethics of the Bible. We can label these as problems with inspiration only if we assume that the objector’s view is infallible.

The instigation of David’s numbering of the people is often cited as a theological contradiction. In 2 Samuel 24:1 we read that God incited David to number Israel and Judah. However, in 1 Chronicles, Satan is said to have “moved David to number Israel” (21:1). Some say that this is indicative of two theologies, one in which God controls the world and the other in which Satan is in control. The solution is not difficult when we understand something about the relationship between God and Satan. God often allows Satan to perform his evil deeds for some greater purpose. Thus God, in this instance, is presented as the ultimate Cause for Satan moving David to this act. Parallel situations are found in God permitting Satan to attack Job (Job 1:12; 2:6) and in His sending an evil spirit to trouble Saul (1 Sam. 16:14).

In seeking solutions to problems such as these, it is important that we have a full understanding of the biblical teaching about a given subject. One verse often brings out one side of the issue and another looks at it from a different side. While the two sides seem contradictory, in reality they are parts of the whole truth. . . .

One of the greatest stumbling blocks to belief in the inspiration of the Scriptures comes when we encounter certain commands of God regarding the enemies of His Old Testament people. Under His orders, the people of Israel were to destroy totally their enemies in the conquest of the Promised Land (Deut. 20:16-18). We can add to this fact the spirit of vengeance and vindictiveness frequently expressed by God’s people against their foes (Ps. 55, 59, 79, 109, 137). Not only do these passages appear to represent immoral actions and attitudes, but they also seem to be in conflict with other teaching, found especially in the New Testament, concerning our responsibility to love our enemies (Luke 6:35-36).

It is not our purpose to discuss all of the aspects of biblical teaching bearing on these issues. Several factors, however, have particular import. Throughout the Scriptures God appears not only as a God of infinite love, but also a God of righteous judgment. There is certainly no change between the Old and New Testaments when we consider the reality of the coming judgment foretold clearly in the New Testament (Rev. 19:11-21). In fact, Jesus spoke more about the eternal destruction of those who refused to come to God than did any of the New Testament writers.

The cries for God's vengeance, which the Psalmist raised against the public enemies of God and His purposes, are only evidence of God's people sharing His concern for righteousness and truth. They point to the time when sin will be put down and righteousness will triumph.

The slaying of the Canaanites is more understandable when we recognize the depth of their depravity. God did not move against them until the cup of their iniquity was full (Gen. 15:16; Lev. 18:24-30). Then, because of the addiction to all forms of gross sin which had thoroughly infected their society, God brought judgment through His people. Professor Arndt describes the situation well:

The Canaanite tribes by their shameless vices had filled the cup of their guilt to overflowing. When the punishment came, it struck all the inhabitants, the women and children included. The fault was not God's; but it lay with those who had trampled underfoot the laws of justice and decency. When men take themselves and their families aboard a ship, sail out upon the ocean for a pleasure trip, and make that ship a place reeking with wickedness and vice, and then all perish in a hurricane which suddenly falls upon them, who is to blame? Will you accuse God for not discriminating between adults and the children? One dreadful aspect of sin is that the woe it produces is like a whirlpool, whose suction draws every object which is near by to the bottom. . . . That the Canaanite women were dissolute and instrumental in causing the Israelites to leave the path of truth and purity, that for the children it was better to perish in infancy than to grow up as devotees of idolatry and vice, are points the mere mention of which will suffice here (W. Arndt, *Bible Difficulties*. St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1932, pp. 53-54).

When we consider the full scope of God's moral nature as taught in Scripture, these problem passages fit. They deal with the stem reality of judgment, but they can be called immoral only if we are prepared to assert our own standard of morality over God's.

Historical Problems

We find historical objections to the Bible arising both from outside information and from alleged internal contradictions. Arguments from outside of the Bible generally have come from historical presuppositions against the supernatural rather than any actual data. For example, one objection, assuming the evolution of man and culture, insisted that the first five books of the Bible, known as the Pentateuch, could not be dated from the time of Moses because most people then were illiterate and Moses was unable to write. Then the Code of Hammurabi was discovered, and since it was written about 1728 B.C., objections to Moses' authorship were dropped.

In other cases, because secular history contained no record of peoples or places mentioned in the Bible, these were taken to be mythological. Millar Burrows, an archeologist from Yale, acknowledges the real source of such problems and at the same time indicates their weakness when he says:

Archaeology has in many cases refuted the views of modern critics. It has shown in a number of instances that these views rest on false assumptions and unreal, artificial schemes of historical development.

One of the most respected archeologists today, the Jewish scholar Nelson Glueck, forthrightly states his findings concerning the historical reliability of Scripture:

As a matter of fact, however, it may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference. Scores of archaeological findings have been made which confirm in clear outline or in exact detail historical statements in the Bible.

With such a record, it would be presumptuous to hold dogmatically that any remaining problems are insolvable.

When we turn to the alleged historical contradictions within Scripture we find again that when all the information is considered, plausible explanations are possible. Variations in the Gospel accounts of the same incident have been the source of problems for many. One of the most popular concerns is Peter's denial and the crowing of the cock. According to Mark's account the cock crew twice (14:30, 72) while Matthew and Luke simply made the statement that before the cock would crow Peter would deny the Lord three times (Matt. 26:34, 74-75; Luke 22:34, 60-61).

There is, however, no direct contradiction here. Matthew and Luke did not say the cock crowed only once as opposed to Mark's twice. They simply referred to the cock crowing. When we remember that "cockcrowing" was a proverbial expression for early morning these accounts can be easily harmonized. According to Mark 13:35 the third of the four Roman night watches was designated the "cock-crowing." But the cock was also apt to crow earlier, from midnight on. Matthew and Luke gave us the main point of Jesus' prediction that Peter would deny the Lord three times before early morning, signaled by the well-known cockcrowing. On the other hand, Mark reported the greater details of Jesus' words. Both accounts are true.

Problems of variation in accounts, such as that of the cockcrowing, can generally be solved if we keep certain principles in mind. We must be sure, first of all, that the incidents were really the same, and not similar, but different, events. Secondly, we must remember that each writer might have been led of the Spirit to bring out a different emphasis, even a different part of a conversation.

Scientific Problems

Most of the scientific problems raised today stem from a so-called scientific approach to reality that rules out the supernatural. Miracles are rejected as myth because they contradict natural laws. When the fact of God is accepted, however, there can be no legitimate reason for denying His supernatural intervention where and when He wills. To insist that what the Bible

calls demonic activity is really unscientific superstition is to base belief on unproven presuppositions and not on true science.

Probably most conflicts arise between the Bible and the theory of evolution. Since evolution has never been demonstrated scientifically, there is no basis to charge the Bible with conclusive error. That evolution is only an unproven theory is recognized not only by Bible-believing scientists but even by many advocates of evolution. Gerald A. Kerkut, who is not a biblical creationist, wrote a book entitled *Implications of Evolution*. (Elmsford, New York: Pergamon Press, 1960). In it he set forth seven fundamental principles of the evolutionary theory. None of these seven, according to Kerkut, have ever been proven.

Certain isolated statements are sometimes raised as examples of the Bible's lack of accurate scientific knowledge. One of the classic instances is Jesus' statement that the mustard seed "is smaller than all other seeds" (Matt. 13:32). Since botanists know of smaller seeds, it is charged that Jesus stated an error. Aside from the fact that it is difficult to understand how we could harmonize an untruth on the lips of Jesus with His claim to speak truth, this statement, when taken in its setting, makes perfectly good sense. Among the seeds the Jews sowed in their gardens or fields, the mustard seed was generally the smallest. Because of this, it became proverbial to speak of it as the smallest of seeds (Matt. 17:20; Luke 17:6).

Jesus was using this proverbial expression as an illustration of spiritual truth. Only if He were intending to make a scientific statement covering all seeds could His statement be charged with error.