

## SHOULD YOU BE GOOD IF THERE IS NO GOD?

**ESSENTIALS:** Is good good whether there is a God or not? Does God make good good? Suppose nothing at all existed. It would be good that there are no people around to suffer. So it is clear that you don't need God or to believe in God to believe in good or bad.

Morality is a different issue. Is there no moral law against hurting a baby unless there is a God to make one? Morality is when God makes it law that you must do good - meaning you will be punished if you break the law and rewarded if you keep it. In fact as good is its own reward and indeed should be, there is no need for God. Those who deny this are unhappy that good is its own reward and want a supernatural entity who is going to go beyond that and administer rewards. That is selfish. The dark side is that they want God to exact retribution if one fails to do good. Those who deny that evil is its own punishment want there to be a supernatural entity who is going to go beyond that and administer punishment. Its vindictive and implicitly threatening.

Is God worried about the baby being hurt or about his rule that the baby must not be hurt? God making a rule that protects babies does not mean he really cares about the babies. You can make a good rule just for the sake of having it obeyed. If you make rules where you don't need them, then you are being vindictive and looking for an ego buzz.

Our sins cannot hurt a God of perfect happiness and who is all-powerful. He has no need for our obedience. Our disobedience does him no harm. Rights are about needs not wants. Therefore he has no right to command us. Therefore popes and religions have no right to command us. They are man-made.

Why is it important that we believe in God? The Church says it is of supreme importance. It says God comes first. Why? Is it because we need to believe in God to believe in morality? No must be the answer. If the answer is yes then absurd consequences occur. For example, it would match the thought, "I must believe in Santa because Christmas is not the same without thinking Santa is coming."

The Church says we have to believe in God to have a sincere belief in morality. Another way of putting this is to say that we are accountable to God so we must believe in him and in his laws of morality.

What authority gave God the right to tell us what to do?

How do we know if he is an impartial judge of right and wrong?

How does he work out what is right and what is wrong?

Why is there so much discord between religions and in religions about what God has decreed or wants?

All these are important questions.

Is good good whether God commands it or not? Some believers reply that it is good merely because God says so. Then clearly the believer is admitting that he will regard murdering prostitutes as holy and good if God says so. It is so dangerous for it is really the believer saying so.

The notion that even wanton murder would be good if God commanded it is the divine command theory.

A religion saying God says such and such is wrong does not mean that he really says it. It could be the religion making the rules and pretending they came from God. Divine command puts us at the mercy of religion.

If the divine command theory is true then the believer who thinks God wants him to eat babies alive should be respected as much as the believer who thinks God wants him to give all he has to the poor. God would not blame either believer for getting the rules wrong as long as they did their best to learn what the rules were.

If God has to consult a standard of right and wrong that is independent of him and autonomous then we have the right to disagree with his interpretation of the standard. The standard matters above all things not him and he is not really the only thing that matters though he says he is.

God either makes good good or he doesn't. Two options. Those who say there is a third option are clearly lying.

Here is the so-called third option.

It is said that good is good because God's character is good and God's character reveals what is good and is not arbitrary. But is God's character good because God makes it good or is it good because good is good whether God recognises it as good or not and it manifests and sanctions that good? So we are back where we started.

The believers do not worry about the idea that what is good is only good because God commands it because God is loving and so will not ask us to do anything harmful. This is really saying that good is good merely because God commands it. This is the divine command theory again. They also say that good is good whether God sees it as good or not. This is the other option. Its not a third option at all. It is just the only two options rephrased to disguise them. The two contradictory options are deceptively presented as complementary!

Some theologians say that God does not invent morality though the divine command theory is true. To put it another way, God's rules about what is right are not arbitrary. But that is like saying that a lie is not a lie.

The "third option" suggests that God will not command us to commit genocide against black people for example. But the fact remains that in principle he can for it becomes good just because he commands it. We are just lucky that he is so good that he will not do it. But we are still defiled by believing in the third option. Hypothetically, we still condone evil. It is evil to think, "God will not command evil things but if he did I would obey him and categorise them as good."

The believers say that goodness is grounded in God's moral nature. Moral means you are bound to a law - and a law without a threat of punishment is not a law at all. He is not like us at all but more like a mind without personal characteristics. So how could he be moral? He is not a moral agent for he cannot be punished if he does wrong. He can't do wrong but that is not the point. God may have a good nature but cannot have a moral nature. Even if you need God to believe in good you do not need him and cannot need him to believe in morality.

Some say that God does not follow a moral standard but does good just because he is good. He has no obligations because he is perfect. These people then deny that morality is morality whether God approves it or not. Religion says that God not being a moral God does not mean in itself that he cannot lay down morality and reward the holy and punish the wicked. It claims that it is not God's fault that he cannot be a moral agent and hence rewarded or punished. But the fact remains God has no need to lay down morality for no matter how bad we get it does not affect him. So he cannot be a moral agent.

The third option claims that what is good and adorable and what we worship in God is his good character. It is alleged that believers do not worship him because of what he commands but because of what the commands say about him as a personal being. They have to say that for worshipping God because of his commands is really just worshipping the commands and not God. To worship Janine's beauty is not to worship her. But to worship God's virtues is not the same as worshipping God either! They can only say that they worship God for he is a person which amounts to saying he is not entitled to any more respect than any person would be. They go on about loving the sinner and hating the sin. They claim that the sin is not the person. But if they love God because of his character that is to say they should not or would not love him if he has a bad character. The doctrine of loving God because of his good character is in complete contradiction to the notion that the person and the sin are unrelated so that you can judge the sin not the sinner at all. In fact the doctrine of God gives us an additional reason to say that bad characters or bad people should not be loved. Not loving them would be at best a necessary evil. Anything however that makes it more justifiable would be bad by default. That is to say, there is enough justification for hating or not loving without bringing in the idea of God with its adding on to the justification.

Morality implies that good is being commanded to be good and a command is not a command unless there is a threat of disapproval which is a form of punishment and of further punishment. A truly good God will not command good. Command implies threats. A real command must prescribe punishment for those who disobey. Rather he will leave us to do good without any pressure. Better to do good spontaneously rather than for the sake of moral law or obedience.

Many believers when you ask them, "Why should I obey God's commands?" say, "Because he commands you to obey." That is not answering the question for it gives us yet another commandment. You are asking for a reason and you are cheated by being given an excuse. The believers beg the question - they assume as true the thing they need to back up with reasons and evidence. It is bullying to refuse to give people reasons to obey and to order them to obey instead.

The believers put the commands above God in the sense that they admit that they would not adore God if it were not for his marvellous commands.

So its a dilemma for believers to decide if good is good no matter what God thinks of it or is good because God orders it to be good. We have seen how religion deals with the dilemma by saying that the answer is that good is God's nature. Is God's nature or character good because God says so? Or is it good whether he does or doesn't? The latter would indicate that it is

good in terms of an autonomous standard. The character thing takes us back to the dilemma again. To say God's character is good is to say that his character matches good but does not make good. It is not to solve the dilemma at all.

Is morality made by God or not? It is either one or the other.

It is said that the naturalist or non-theist faces a similar problem. Are moral values good because the naturalists or non-theists say so or are they good because of some objective standard?

But no naturalist or non-theist claims that something is good just because they want it to be or say it is. They think there is an independent standard. And so there is.  $1 + 1 = 2$  even if there is nothing at all and no God. Morality at best is working out what causes the least pain. Will action x lead to pain on a scale of 10 or 20? Maths is the ground of ethics or morality.

And it is more honest of the naturalist or non-theist to argue, "X is good and doing other than X is bad because I say so," than to blame God for saying it.

Is good good because people command it or is it good in itself? That is what should be asked. Not, "Is good good because God commands it or is it good in itself?" It is manipulative to ask the second instead of the first. Why? Because we are only told about God by people who claim to be speaking with his authority. It is really what they say about God that we trust not God. We cannot truly trust God when our knowledge of him is second-hand and hearsay. To ask the second instead of the first is trying to stop people from realising that man tells them what to believe about God. It is hoped that by putting the focus on the alleged divine origin of right and wrong that we will end up considering blind obedience to God. To ask the first question encourages people to think critically about human morality and laws. The second question is about stifling criticism and the first is about encouraging it in a constructive way.

Let us assume we need to believe in morality. The dilemma about good being a command or real implies that bringing God in only makes the problem worse. Bringing God in would be immoral. Leaving him out of the dilemma, means that if the problem is bad then morality is a necessary evil. It would not be immoral but a necessary evil because we have no alternative.

To say that it does not matter if I do good or bad for there is no accountability before God implies that if I do good I should just do it because I will have to answer for it to God and won't want to be punished by him. It really suggests that good is just a fiction, a chimera and an illusion. It is good in itself to feed a starving dog regardless of God or eternal life. What does it say about a person that they would have a problem with that?

The virtues of compassion and courage are useful here in earth but not in Heaven where suffering and vulnerability cease and there is only happiness. Some may argue that there is no point in having the virtues if they are no good in Heaven. The Catholic answer is that the virtues are good in themselves. They say that the virtues are not used in Heaven but the saints still have them. They say that Mother Teresa would be good even if she were on a planet where there was nobody to help. She was simply good. Translation: being good is what matters not doing good. Society will not agree with that so why is the Catholic faith such a force in society?

Catholics believe that God is not in the business of making people happier and enhancing their pleasure but is more concerned that they use their free will correctly and become good people. Again, society will not agree with that so why is the Catholic faith such a force in society?

Christians say God didn't make us to be happy but to have joy. Does that make sense? It does if you understand happiness as wellbeing and joy as something you experience when you are very very far from well. If you had a lot of joy you would count as a happy person. So the Christians mean that God does not want you to feel good much but allows it occasionally! If we often have to sacrifice happiness that does not mean we are not here to be happy. It only means that sometimes happiness is a block to bringing about more happiness. You may have to confine yourself to the house and miss a lot of parties and become unhappy in order to study and gain the greater happiness and benefit of passing your exams.

The idea that we need to believe in God to be happy is heretical because God sometimes intends that people suffer depression and so on. Those who are happy are to have the attitude, "I accept happiness because God gives it to me and not because I like being happy. My motive is all about him." That is a very negative way to approach happiness. The idea that there is no real happiness without faith in God accuses the happy people who don't believe or who don't care if God exists or not of being frauds and of being a bad and harmful influence in society. If you follow God to be happy and not for his own sake then it is happiness you love and not him. Following God properly will be very stressful and difficult. It is hard to want to love God. And Jesus made it harder by saying you must love God in all that you do and with all your heart meaning emotions. He did say you can love your neighbour as yourself but he did not imply that self-love is allowed. And note that he said loving your neighbour as yourself is God's commandment meaning you must do it not for the sake of your neighbour but for God! That is not heartfelt love. Jesus did not command that we feel love for our neighbour - in fact he

said we should not for we must love God with all and not most of our heart.

If you suffer great evil on earth, God cannot make it up to you ever! The evil still happened. He cannot make it up to you in moral terms or any other terms. So why should it matter to you if there is a good or moral God?

Suppose I steal. Why is this wrong? It may just be bad. Or it may be bad because God forbids stealing. If it is just bad, then it is bad whether there is a God or not. If something is bad, that does not mean that God has the authority to forbid it. If stealing is bad because God says so then it follows that it is not the stealing that is bad but the disobeying of God. That actually shows that if there are moral people among the devotees of God it is in spite of their faith and not because of it. God cannot have the authority to ban stealing because we need to see for ourselves that it is bad regardless of who forbids it. Surely the state has the authority to forbid us to kill? That is different for the state is about control and has to be in a dog eat dog world.

When a claim is very strange and out of the ordinary and/or very important, you need a lot of evidence before you can accept it. That is if you are a self-respecting individual and if you are not self-respecting you will be a danger to others. Suppose as religion says, you cannot believe that morality is real unless you believe in God. You would need the evidence for God to be overwhelming if you need to believe in God in order to justify saying that immorality is objectively real and factual. But it isn't ...

Let us rephrase that. If moral principles are facts, and they are not facts unless God is a fact, then you need to prove God is a fact. You need the same degree of evidence that God exists as that you have the sense of touch. But we cannot know even if God exists that he is a fact.

Religion is merely setting morality up for collapse! Its record shows it is capable of that! Many would say it is to blame for the dictatorship of relativism that we have now.

Even if we do think morality or the right and wrong principles is or are ultimately useless, we still need to practice it or them and we want to. If a painkiller stops a toothache for seven seconds it is ultimately useless but we might still take the painkiller. It is what is immediately useful that matters more than what is ultimately useful. So ultimate usefulness or uselessness is not a relevant concern.

Morality is about rules that are enforced by law. Morality is a law. Rules that are said to be about helping to make you happy, are really saying you cannot be trusted to make yourself happy and so you need to be kept in check. The rules are not rules unless God or the Church or society is going to admonish you and make you suffer should you flout them. This principle is one of the reasons why even if religion seems easygoing we should see that in principle it wants to take away our freedom. Why do we need rules? Why not suggestions? It is better to do the right thing because of a suggestion than a rule! Doing good should be spontaneous.

It is said that if atheism is true, then it ultimately does not matter if we are good or not. In other words, we will all be dead and then any good we have done will be useless. This contradicts the idea that good is just good in itself. As we have seen Catholicism says that though the virtues or many of them are no good in Heaven, what matters is that we will be good if we go there.

Good exists. We know its good to be happy. Morality is about doing the greatest good. Not everybody believes in morality but they believe in good. They believe good exists but that nobody can really be sure what the greatest good is for our actions all have consequences that we cannot control. Thus they insist that we must be humble and instead of thinking we are good we must say we have tried our best. Religion does not have this humility. It claims to know what is right and what is wrong clearly. And it distinguishes between "good" people and "bad".

The wrong we do is none of God's business. The priesthood knows that well enough for it is the chief argument today defended by those who wish to live their lives as they see fit. The principle is the reason why so many Catholics for example ignore the teaching of the Church.

The Church targets and attracts the vulnerable and the uneducated and the thoughtless. The lies surrounding God and morality show that Christianity is manipulative. Manipulative means having a hidden agenda and not telling the whole story. The faith even when its not expressed in extremist terms is an open invitation to extremism.