

SERMON ON THE MORAL ARGUMENT FOR GOD

Our Blessed Lord was approached by a man who said to him, “Good teacher.” Jesus replied, “Why do you call me good for nobody is good only God?” Jesus’ reply indicates that unless we see that God and goodness cannot be separated we will never understand what goodness is.

Good cannot command itself. Only a person with authority can command good and make it obligatory. God must command us to be good. Thus if there is no God there is no reason to be good. But we know we should be good. This tells us that God must exist.

Let us examine the relationship between God and goodness/morality.

God commands good.

Does he command good because it is good? If he does then goodness is independent of him. Or is what he commands good simply because he commands it? If it is, then child-molestation would be good if he commanded it.

This seems to prove that you don’t need belief in God to be good. It seems that to do things because he commands them is refusing to be an adult and take responsibility for your life and actions. This seems convincing because it gives us two options - a dilemma. But it overlooks the third. The third is:

That objective good exists. That is to say, it is wrong to molest a child even if you believe that it is not. It’s wrong in itself.

Next that God’s character is objectively good.

He commands good because his character is good. In other words, he commands good because he is good.

Let us look at this again. The dilemma is, does God command good because it is good or good just because God commands it? If God commands things because they are good, then goodness is above him. The solution to the dilemma is that goodness is God’s character and this character is above his commandments and they express that goodness. So the dilemma is right in saying that goodness is above God’s commands but wrong in proposing that this is an abstract goodness. The goodness that is above the commandments and that makes them good is the goodness of God’s character.

The gospels tell us that Jesus promised us forgiveness of sins.

To sin is to disobey a command of God. Jesus describes God as perfectly loving and as our Father. He is telling us that we need to recognise that God forbids evil and commands good. He says that God does not deceive or err. God’s commands then are not given because God believes they are right but because God objectively knows they are right.

Good is either subjective or objective. If it is subjective, then even if an action does great harm, it is good as long as the performer of the act meant it to be good. The idea of objective good holds that if an act is bad, it is bad even if he person didn’t mean any harm.

If we think right and wrong are merely God’s opinion then we do not understand what sin is. We cannot then properly ask God to forgive it. This problem is worsened if we surmise that right and wrong are merely human opinion. It would be offensive to God to suggest we must go to him for pardon for offences against human suppositions. We would be declaring ourselves to be slaves of human thinking and not servants of God.

Objective good means you can discover what is really bad or really good. You don’t invent these categories. They exist whether you recognise them or not. The moral relativist would say that in a culture where polygamy is condemned it is wrong and in a culture where it is accepted it is right. The moral objectivists will say that one of these cultures is wrong about polygamy. To say that morality is subjective is to say that religious beliefs are subjective too. That idea suggests that if you don’t believe in Jesus that is fine - who cares! But Jesus says he is the only way to God and its not fine. We must come to him to be saved by him and to be prepared for eternal life.

If moral subjectivism is true, why speak about what you believe about right and wrong ? Why try to influence society to live in a better way? Why bother engaging in ethical debate?

God is our rock. He does not change his moral standards to suit the fashions. This belief has the power to unite us together

as members of his family washed from sin in the blood of Jesus Christ. Where there are no agreed standards there can be no unity. Jesus paid the price for our sin for our sin is real. And because he has atoned for it we can be freed from it by his pardon.

Because God stands for a morality that is real we can feel safe with him. We can consider him our saviour and know he will do right by us. Objective moral values make a relationship with God possible. Our conscience naturally tells us that some actions are objectively wrong. It is so natural to go to God for forgiveness for our sins. God is the kind of God that does good things. His character is objectively good and his commands express that character and tell us more about it.

Let us pray that our consciences may be better informed about the realities of right and the realities of wrong so that God may teach us more about his good nature through this insight. Amen.

RESPONSE:

If good is good simply because God commands it and for no other reason, then God can encourage you to murder a baby purely for fun. So the Christians respond that he will not do that. So in reality, good is good simply because God commands it and he fortunately will not encourage you to murder a baby for he likes to support and care for life. It is his nature.

This is an argument from luck. God could command it but luckily he does not.

And if God commands things and that makes them good, then what is so wrong with him encouraging the murder of a baby? The Christians are acting like it would be terrible if he did. They do not believe their argument.

The argument is as dangerous as moral relativism. It in fact pretends to believe in right and wrong. At least relativism doesn't pretend!