

BIBLE:

A Dangerous Moral Guide

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Let me begin this address, in which I hope to show that the Bible is a dangerous moral guide, by eliminating from the Scriptures the notion of divine authority. Although millions believe that the Bible is the word of God, that belief is supported by no evidence whatever. For nobody knows that a God exists, indeed, imagination fails to conceive of an infinite being; and even though it could be demonstrated that there is a God, that fact would not in the remotest manner tend to support the claim that he inspired the Bible. From this it follows that **the fact that the Bible has much to say about God is not evidence that it is *his* word. The fact that some Jews living in Palestine two thousand years ago put their thoughts of God in writing does not make an unthinkable God responsible for what they wrote.** Millions of men have talked of God and written of him without any authority but their own. The world has many sacred books and the believers in each of these assert that theirs and theirs alone is the true revelation of the Deity. It is certain that all but one of these holy Bibles must be of human origin; and why except the other? In the nature of things there can be no sound reason for the belief that the stupidities and superstitions, the cruelties and crimes of a collection of ancient Jewish writings are the inspired word of an infinite God.

There is another thing. If the Bible were the most nearly perfect of any book in the world, that fact would not prove its divine origin. If the purity of its moral precepts, the justice of its laws, the accuracy of its historical teachings, the exactness of its science, the grandeur of its philosophy, the beauty of its poetry, entitled it to claim the foremost place among the writings of humanity - a standard of excellence which the Bible utterly fails to attain--the evidence that it is the word of God would still be wanting. The great poems and dramas, the grand orations, the wondrous works of science, philosophy and fiction, are not inspired of God. They are but the noble productions of the human intellect--the creations of genius--the splendid expressions of what man has thought and felt and hoped. If we judge the Bible as we judge other books, the phantom of inspiration will vanish from the world.

But why talk about the inspiration of the Bible until we know whether or not that book is true? And if the Scriptures are true, what need is there of inspiration? How could inspiration help the truth? If two and two are four without inspiration,

could any amount of inspiration make their added value five? Is it not obvious that if the Bible is true it is not inspired, since inspiration could not increase the value of truth? On the other hand, if the Bible is not true, it can not be inspired, for no amount of inspiration could improve its original falsity. An inspired falsehood would be a falsehood still!

The truth is that *the doctrine of inspiration* is a pious fiction that was invented by the Jewish and Christian priests for the purpose of winning for their fanciful religious claims an acceptance and a reverence which they never would have commanded without that alleged authority of God.

That the Bible is not inspired, that it is not true, is proved by many facts, by the falsity of its science, by the foolishness of its philosophy, by the wild exaggerations of its history, and by the immoral character of many of its teachings. I am going to examine some of the moral teachings of the Bible in the light of reason and humanity.

In this world man must have truth. Truth is the priceless jewel of the soul. It is the enduring glory of thought that leads the destinies of the world from the throne of man's inquiring brain. The whole round of human well-being, all correct human relations, rest on truth. Without truth there could be no civilization. **To seek the truth is one of the noblest occupations in which man can engage. To proclaim it to the world, however unpopular it may be, is one of the most splendid of virtues.** On the contrary, to uphold and spread falsehood is immoral. The Bible upholds falsehood; therefore the Bible is a dangerous moral guide. In Jeremiah, chapter 20, verse 7, Jeremiah complains: "*O Lord, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived.*" In chapter 4, verse 10, the prophet again charges God with deception: "*Ah, Lord God, surely thou has greatly deceived this people and Jerusalem.*" The imputation against God is stronger in the ninth verse of the fourteenth chapter of Ezekiel: "*And if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I, the Lord, have deceived that prophet.*"

What strange assertions and avowals to find in a so-called inspired book! Think of an infinite God who would stoop to deceive his children! Is there a thoughtful Christian who can really believe that a God of truth inspired these words found in the twenty-second chapter of I. Kings: "*And the Lord said, who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that-manner. And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the Lord, and said, I will persuade him. And the Lord said unto him, Wherewith? and he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him and prevail also: go forth, and do so. Now therefore, behold, the Lord hath put a lying spirit in the month of all these thy prophets, and the Lord hath spoken evil concerning thee!*"

Is this the language of inspiration? Is there a God who desires us to believe that he once advertised for a lying spirit, and that he sent the liar to deceive the prophets of a petty king? Surely not!

Nor is the New Testament a spotless champion of veracity. In the third chapter of Romans, Paul offers this astounding justification of falsehood: "*For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory; why yet am I also judged as a sinner?*" **According to Paul, a man is not a sinner if he lies for the glory of God.** In this matter the apostle to the Gentiles has the hearty concurrence of

many modern preachers. In II. Corinthians, 12, 16, Paul writes: "*Being crafty, I caught you with guile*"--that is to say deceit, falsehood.

The Bible that upholds lying in this way, sets the example of falsehood by justifying it, and so makes itself the enemy of truth. Hence, as the Bible condones the use of falsehood in teaching, it is a dangerous moral guide.

The world needs honesty no less than truth. Without honest dealing there can be no real morality. The cheat, the thief, is the despoiler of his fellow-men. Notwithstanding this, the Bible upholds both cheating and stealing. What teaching could be more pernicious than the following advice to the rogue? (Deut. 14, 21): "*Ye shall not eat of anything that dieth of itself: thou shalt give it unto the stranger that is in thy gates, that he may eat it; or thou mayest sell it unto an alien.*" Could anything be more perverse than the permission to sell to the alien--any foreign born, unnaturalized resident--for food, the flesh of an animal that died of itself? Such an animal might have died of disease and its flesh might, therefore, be poisonous. Those who wrote the book of Deuteronomy were aware of this. They felt their stomachs turning over at the thought of eating carrion. Such flesh, however, must not be lost. It must be eaten by somebody--preferably somebody who will buy it. Therefore they enjoined the Jewish people to give this diseased and poisonous flesh to the strangers dwelling among them, or to sell it to aliens. And may we not conclude that it would be asking too much to expect an enterprising Jew to give away what he might sell?

How would you like, Mr. Christian, to have a butcher sell to you for use on your table, the flesh of a creature that died of itself? Your wife has been very ill. The fever, at last, begins to wane. Delirium gives place to rational consciousness. The heart again beats with high hope. The eyes resume their former brightness. The pallid cheek is once more illumined with the divine smile of a good woman's love. Your wife, the mother of your children, is convalescent. The physician in attendance prescribes beef-broth. Now comes a butcher to your door with a large cut of beef from an ox that died of itself--died of disease. For this reason he would not have his family eat it, but being a devout believer in the inspiration of the Bible, he is perfectly willing to obey the sacred word and sell the poisonous flesh to you, in order that your delicate wife may have beef-broth. What would you think, Mr. Christian, of a butcher who would commit such a crime against yourself and the woman you love? Would you not be in favor of teaching him a lesson in common humanity with the full penalty of the law?

To sell for food the flesh of a creature that died of itself is, in all civilized countries, a crime punishable with a fine, or imprisonment, or both. But why punish a man for obeying the injunction of the Bible? Because, in this respect, to practice the precept of the Scriptures is to commit a crime. The Bible is a dangerous moral guide.

I cheerfully admit that the Bible says, "*Thou shalt not steal.*" At the same time, it must be acknowledged that that book, without which, so the dear clergy contend, there would be no honesty in the world, is loud in its praise of stealing.

In the third chapter of Exodus, this command to steal is put into the mouth of God: "*And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians: and it shall come to pass that, when ye go, ye shall not go empty: But every woman shall borrow of her neighbor, and of her that sojourneth in the house, jewels of silver,*

and jewels of gold, and raiment: and ye shall put them upon your sons, and upon your daughters; and ye shall spoil the Egyptians." The twelfth chapter says: "and the children of Israel did according to the word of Moses; and they borrowed of the Egyptians jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: And the Lord gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they lent unto them such things as they required. And they spoiled the Egyptians."

To steal under the pretext of borrowing is the meanest kind of thievery. It is theft made worse by cowardice. Moreover, this kind of theft is impossible without the use of falsehood--the promise that the goods will be returned. Yet the Bible upholds this kind of theft by claiming for it the sanction and command of God!

To defend these passages, as the clergy sometimes do, by pleading that the Egyptians had oppressed the Israelites does not help the matter in the least. For, it was Pharaoh who had been the task-master over the Jews, and the Egyptians who were robbed were the common people. And even though the Egyptians did owe the Jews something, a real God, if he were honest, would enable his people to collect their dues without resorting to falsehood and theft.

Over and over again in the Old Testament, the Jews are commanded to steal the property of their neighbors. Not only that: these robberies are represented as being committed with the direct assistance of God. And in some instances, as in the case of the Midianites, the story of whose massacre is related in the thirty-first chapter of Numbers, God, as one of the bandits, is allotted a share of the spoil!

In all these recitals of robbery, the Bible, by ranging its authority on the side of the thief, shows itself to be a dangerous moral guide.

A fearful record of misery and suffering is the history of human slavery. From the dawn of civilization until modern times this colossal crime trampled the face of man in the dust of degradation. Thousands of years before a line of the Bible was written, every nation in the world had its slaves. In the field, the forest, the mine, the canal, on pyramid and temple, on land and sea, in war and peace, the poor slave wore his life away in the service of his master, conscious that his lot would be the fate of his generations yet unborn.

Slavery outraged the rights of man. It denied the blessing of liberty, their joy of freedom, to many millions of human beings. It denied to man the right to own property, to build himself a home, to take an active interest in the world as the equal of his fellow, to enjoy the drama of life with the fullest appreciation of the free. It invaded the sacred sanctuary of love, robbed man of the right to choose his wife, and forced the women to marry the man her master chose for her. It destroyed family life by separating husbands and wives; and with a hand more ruthless still it tore the child from the frantic mother's breast and sold it at a distance where she might never again look into its eyes. All the natural relations of life were reversed, despised, destroyed by the infamous slave code. The Master owned the slave. Body and soul must submit to the dictates of the despot's will. The slave was a creature held for the profit of his master. He was bred and bought and sold, fed and starved and worked and whipped, as his lord and master chose.

It is true that in the Roman Empire, before the introduction of Christianity, the position of the slave had been, for some time, improving. Numerous laws were enacted in his favor. Many slaves were highly educated. Some even were doctors, authors and teachers. Manumissions were common. The great pagan empire was

marching towards the light of freedom. Then Christianity came. Darkness settled upon the world. In the course of a thousand years slavery passed into serfdom. Then came the African slave trade among the Christian nations -- the most frightful form slavery has ever assumed.

In the United States, it was a crime to educate the slave. The world of intellect was not for him. The light of knowledge must not penetrate his brain. The law denied him cultured thought even as it denied him freedom. He was the mudsill of society and his mind must be buried in darkness beneath the weight of grievous social abuses. The American slave could not testify against his master in the courts. If the master committed murder in the presence of his slaves, they could not be witnesses against him.

Such were slavery's crimes against humanity. Such was the system of spoliation which, beginning in the morning of civilization, flourished with various changes throughout the centuries of history, polluting and destroying the happiness of many millions of the sons and daughters of men.

Before the Bible was written, no divine authority could be pleaded in defense of slavery. All the laws and customs that bound the bondman to his chains were born in the minds of men. But now the Scriptures are about to be written. A divine regime -- so we should fondly understand -- is about to dawn upon the world, a God of justice and love is going to dispel the darkness of earth with the light of heaven -- is going to teach equality and brotherhood in an inspired moral code. He has heard the plea of the tortured slave, the awful stroke of the cutting lash, the master's cruel curse. The moan of the mother has reached his ears, and the cries of the little one sold from the breast of love, have touched his heart with pain. The infinite heart at last overflows. The divine message comes to earth. We read it with eagerness and care, and what do we find this book to say? Does it sound a clarion call to freedom? Does it bid the chains of slavery break and fall? Does it command the master to stay his lash, and the slave to stand erect and free? Does it proclaim in burning words that all men are entitled to freedom"? No! No indeed! To all these questions the Bible gives answers that assassinate our hopes. Its smile is for the oppressor. For freedom it has but a frown. Its greeting to the slave is a chain.

In the twenty-first chapter Of Exodus, the Bible, the much belauded charter of liberty, reads the following advice to the slave holder: *"If thou buy a Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve; and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing. If he came in by himself, he shall go out by himself; if he were married, then his wife shall go with him. If his master has given him a wife and she has born him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself. And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free: Then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl, and he shall serve him forever."* In this law the buying of human beings is recognized. Slavery is not only recognized but regulated. Nor is it the slavery of Negroes with which we are here concerned. It is the slavery of white men and white women--the slavery of Jews. This inspired statute allows the slave to recover his freedom after six years of servitude on one condition only -- he must desert his wife and children! He may purchase his freedom solely at the expense of separation from his loved ones. To remain with his wife and babes he must remain in slavery, and not only that: he must submit to the barbaric practice of

having his ear bored through with an awl. Thus marked because he prefers his home to liberty, he is to be a slave forever. Yet we are confidently assured that the blessed volume is the friend of freedom, and love, and home.

The Bible allows the master to kill his slave and go unpunished. In the chapter above quoted, we read: *"If a man smite his servant or his maid with a rod, and he die under his hand, he shall be surely punished. Notwithstanding, if he continue a day or two, he shall not be punished; for he is his money."* Only when the slave falls dead beneath the blow shall the master be punished. But let the blow be equally fatal, let the man or the woman linger in agony and die the next day, and the murderous master must not be punished. Why? The reason given is a curious one: the slave is his master's money! Who but an inspired writer could have framed such an ingenious justification of murder? --the slave may be killed with impunity if the mortal blow is not fatal immediately because he is his master's money!

The New Testament supports the Old in binding the shackles to the limbs of the slave. In Ephesians 6:5, Paul says: *"Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ,"* And in Timothy 6:1, he writes: *"Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed."* The slave is commanded to cringe and cower and worship at his master's feet. He is told to hug his chains, to prize his degradation, to look up to his master and obey him as though he were the very Christ. The master, whether kind or cruel, is worthy of all honor, and must be obeyed lest the doctrine of God be blasphemed! These rules and regulations regarding slavery, these commands to men and women to fall upon their knees in obedience to the despot's will, strike at the root of liberty and encourage the oppressor to oppress. These precepts are the language of cowardice. They would sap self reliance and destroy independence. They swear allegiance to stagnant injustice and denounce the progress of free men as rebellion. These words flatter the tyrant, but to his victim they are a message of despair and death. On the authority of these words Christian masters felt themselves justified in holding slaves. Innumerable theologians argued from them that slavery was a divine institution. The attitude of these pious gentlemen on the question of slavery was scornfully expressed by Whittier in *"Clerical Oppressors"* --

*"Just God--and these are they
Who minister at thine altar, God of right!
Men who their hands with prayer and blessing lay
On Israel's ark of light!
What! Preach and kidnap men?
Give thanks, and rob thy own afflicted poor?
Talk of thy glorious liberty, and then
Bolt hard the captive's door?
What! Servants of thy own
Merciful son, who came to seek and save
The homeless and the outcast--fettering down*

The tasked and plundered slave!

Pilate and Herod friends!

Chief priests and rulers, as of old, combine!

Just God and holy! is that church which lends

Strength to the spoiler, thine?"

When the challenge of the abolitionists provoked the cry that [the Bible favors slavery](#), the answer rang forth clear and true, "So much the worse for the Bible." [Slavery was abolished in spite of the Bible, in spite of the church](#), in spite of all the ministerial defenses of the traffic in human flesh and of all the clerical denunciations of the friends of freedom. The Bible was and is the upholder of slavery. Therefore, the Bible is a dangerous moral guide.

Every thoughtful person, not a bigot, knows that religious persecution is an outrage and a crime. **If a man has any rights at all, he certainly has the right to follow the light of conscience in religious matters.** But the Bible will not admit this. Narrow, bigoted, intolerant, that book prescribes the death penalty for any person who dares to suggest a change of religious belief. Could anything be crueler than these words from the thirteenth chapter of Deuteronomy? *"If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods.' Thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him, neither shalt thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him. But thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people. And thou shalt stone him with stones that he die."*

Such is the religious liberty of the Bible. If your nearest and dearest relative asks you to join him in the worship of any God but Jehovah, it is your duty to assist in putting him to death. If your son suggests the worship of another God, he must cease to be the object of your tender regard. Your heart of love for him must turn to stone. To shield, to pity, to love him would be rebellion against Jehovah. Your thoughtful son must die. However brave and kind and true, his life must be destroyed. In obedience to the Bible you must throw the first stone. With the help of your neighbors you must murder your innocent child. Such is the religious liberty of the Bible.

And what shall we say of the awful intolerance that would visit death upon the worshipper of the objects of nature? The seventeenth chapter of Deuteronomy declares: *"If there be found among you within any of thy gates ... man or woman that hath ... gone and served other gods and worshipped them, either the sun, or moon, or any of the host of heaven ... Then shalt thou bring forth that man or that woman, who have committed that wicked thing unto thy gates and thou shalt stone them with stones till they die."* Think of regarding as a safe moral guide a book that would deliver a woman to the executioner for worshipping the sun! Millions of the noblest men and women have lived and died as sun worshippers. Sun worship appears to be, indeed, the most natural of all religions. But according to the Bible the sun worshipper has no right to live. That book decrees that whoever falls upon his knees in honor of the orb of day must die a martyr to his faith.

Suppose you were a devout believer in the Bible, and suppose that while walking through a beautiful garden with your wife on a day when all nature was made glad by the wooing warmth and light of the cheering sun, your wife should say to you, with happy enthusiasm and conviction: *"O What a glorious God is the sun! He wakes from slumber at early morn while darkness sits upon the throne of night. He sends his potent rays abroad and floods the world with wondrous light. He invigorates and cheers all things that live, and beneath his warm and magic touch things rise as from the dead and throb and thrill with life. He clothes the hillside, field and valley with trees and vines and grasses that bear in rich profusion delicious fruits and foods. As with an artist's hand, he paints the gardens and the fields in all the hues and colors of flowers in bloom. While lovers woo upon the banks of pleasant streams, the peaceful waters sparkle beneath his warm bright rays, and while the happy bird upon the branch pours forth his soul in joyous song, the placid lake reflects the image of the source of light. From the ocean's waves the sun draws vapor to the clouds; in clouds the vapor drifts about and later falls to earth in rain; and now appears the sun again, whose smile upon the water drops still lingering in the air, illuminates the shy with the enchanting rainbow. If the sun should vanish from the sky, all life would disappear from earth. We are the children of the sun. All life and love, all joy and hope come from the source of light. I love the sun! To me he is the greatest of the Gods. Every day I fall upon my knees and worship him as the divine father and universal king."*

Suppose your wife should thus solemnly confess herself to you a worshipper of the sun, as a believer in the Bible you can no longer shield and love her. You must disown her as your wife. All the years of her devotion to your joy you must forget. Her plea for sympathy you must ignore. She has worshipped the sun; that is enough. The Bible cries for vengeance; its intolerant God must be obeyed; you must help to kill your loving wife, whose last word breathes forgiveness on your cruel act. Such is the religious liberty of the Bible. That book enslaves not only the body, it enslaves also the mind. It makes death the penalty for religious progress.

But some may say that the New Testament is in favor of religious liberty. The truth is that the New Testament is as intolerant as the Old. In Galatians 1:9, Paul declares: *"If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed."* In the fifth chapter of the same Epistle the cursing apostle approves of death to the foes of his faith: *"I would they were even cut off which trouble you."* According to Luke 19:27, Jesus gave utterance to this frightful command: *"But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me."* And the most terrible lines in all literature--lines that have surpassed all others in causing human suffering--are found in the last chapter of the Gospel of Mark: *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."*

By the word *"damned"* the church has always understood eternal torment in the fires of another world. Christianity has ever been, and is, a religion of belief. According to that religion, he who holds the right belief will enjoy eternal happiness in heaven, but he who doubts or denies the Christian creed will endure the agonies of hell through all the future's never ending years. For many centuries, this bigoted and heartless faith deformed and brutalized the intellect of the world. The church was eager to save the souls of men. There was no salvation except by Christian faith. The duty of the church was clear: she must force all men to believe.

It was a work of mercy, as she thought, to torture the body here to save the soul hereafter. What were a few moments of pain inflicted on an unbeliever here, thought she, if by that suffering he could be induced to change his mind, to become converted, and to escape the agonies of hell through the gracious forgiveness of Christ. The church knew that in the New Testament, as in the Old, the believer is commanded to persecute in the name of the faith. The devout Christian was he who willingly obeyed the voice of his inspired book. Accordingly, when the church rose to power in the Roman Empire, she entered upon the terrible task of forcing her cruel creed upon the world. Openly, boldly, without remorse, she hunted down those whom she regarded as her foes. After many centuries stained with blood and wet with tears, the church divided on points of doctrine; but the Reformers had no quarrel with Rome on the ground of persecution. They were persecutors too. In the creeds of the early Protestant churches, persecution for opinion's sake was a distinct and definite doctrine of faith and practice. Under the Lutherans and the Calvinists, under the Church of England as under the Church of Rome, the awful work of cruelty continued, until the progress of knowledge, the advancement of science, and the growing power of skepticism wrenched the red hand of superstition from the throat of an outraged world!

No power of imagination can conceive of the pain that has been inflicted on innocent men and women because the Bible is a persecuting book and because therefore Christianity has ever been a persecuting faith. Some were locked in dungeons dark and deep and left to slowly die of hunger and of thirst. Some were sewn in bags and thrown to the hungry waves. Some were tied to stakes on the seashore to be drowned by the slowly rising tide. Some were stretched on racks of torture until their joints were torn apart. Some were flayed and buried alive. Some had their eyes extinguished, their ears and arms cut off, their tongues removed with pincers, their legs crushed and broken in iron boots. Some were strangled. Myriads were hanged. Enough to populate a world were burned alive; and no historian can compute how many millions fell on fanatic fields in fierce religious wars.

For ages the church exhausted her ingenuity in devising ways and means of torture! The noblest and the best fell victims to her mad and solemn zeal. The scientist and the philosopher, the scholar and the statesman, the judge, the priest, the preacher, old men and women with wrinkled brows and whitened hair, brave youths and loving maidens, even children of tender years -- all those who doubted or departed from the faith were done to death by the Christian Church. The Bible was her textbook. Purity of faith here and salvation hereafter was her aim. And thus through all the centuries of her power she destroyed the life and happiness of man on the authority of her claims that the Bible is divine. *It is the verdict of history that the Christian Church has caused more unmerited suffering, and shed more innocent blood than any other institution the world has known.* Back of all this agony -- back of all the martyred millions, the ruined homes, the blasted reputations, the deserted friends -- back of all the cruel carnage of religious persecution -- stands the authority of the Bible! *Following the Bible has led to the martyrdom of humanity.* Therefore, the Bible is a dangerous moral guide.

What could be more revolting, more completely suffused with horror, than cannibalism? Yet the Bible upholds the eating of human flesh -- the flesh, not of strangers, but of your own loved ones. In the twenty-eighth chapter of Deuteronomy may be read these infamous words: *"And thou shalt eat the fruit of*

thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters, which the Lord thy God hath given thee... The man that is tender among you shall eat "the flesh of his children... The tender and delicate woman among you... her eye shall be evil toward her children whom she shall bear: for she shall eat them." Behold the awful spectacle. Tender fathers and delicate mothers eating the flesh of their dimpled babes! The Bible is in earnest when it tells parents that they shall eat the flesh of their children. How fiendish are these words from the ninth verse of the nineteenth chapter of Jeremiah: *"And I will cause them to eat the flesh of their sons, and the flesh of their daughters, and they shall eat every one the flesh of his friend."* Christians tell us that the men who wrote these frightful passages were inspired. But can we be certain that they were not insane? At any rate it must be acknowledged that a book containing such monstrous teachings is a dangerous moral guide.

Since the Bible upholds so many other crimes, we need not be surprised to find that it advocates murder. In the thirty-second chapter of Exodus occurs this command: *"Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbor."* The order was obeyed, and, according to the story, three thousand men were killed. For what? Because some ignorant wretches had worshipped a golden calf!

Listen to this perfectly fiendish command, from the fifteenth chapter of I Samuel: *"Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass."* How humane! Fancy the nobility of a soldier who would butcher women and babes! Think of a God issuing an order to have infants and suckling carved with the sword! Even the cattle must be wantonly destroyed.

Among his many curses, Jeremiah wrote this in chapter forty-eight, verse ten: *"Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord deceitfully, and cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood."* What a saintly character Jeremiah was!

Here is a gem from the pen of the raving Ezekiel, who ate Old Testament manuscripts at the command of God: *"Slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children; and women."* (Ezekiel 9:6). Only a mad man or a fiend could have uttered such inhuman words.

According to the thirty-first chapter of Numbers, it was by command of God that a Jewish army made war on the Midianites. All the men of the nation were slain in battle while engaged in defending their lives and their homes. The women and children were taken captive; and when their property had been stolen, their castles and their cities burned, and their country left in desolation, they were brought to the camp where Moses stood. On seeing these unfortunate women, the meek one flew into a passion of rage, *"Have ye saved all the women alive?"* he angrily exclaimed. Then this man of God gave his soldiers these infamous instructions: *"Now therefore kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman. ... But all the women children... keep alive for yourselves."* Never fell more heartless words from human lips.

In imagination I can see those woeful mothers, their eyes streaming with tears, their hearts heavy with pain, lovingly holding their baby boys in their trembling arms and pleading that their lives may be spared. Their husbands have been slain, but they want to live for their little ones, *"If you will kill us,"* they cry, *"do spare*

our babes!" But their plaintive wails find no lodgment in the barbarian soldiers' breasts. Their hearts are pierced with cruel spears; the air is rent with unheeded screams; and in a little while all the mothers and baby boys of a nation lie where they were massacred in a foreign land.

But a worse fate awaited the maidens who had seen their mothers fall. These, thirty-two thousand in number, were distributed amongst the soldiers who had murdered their people, and the barbarians who had remained at home. Thus was the servitude of loathsome lust forced on these girls by the assassins of their loved ones. And this measureless infamy is said to have been committed by command of God!

The Lord promised Joshua that he would be with him. With this encouragement Joshua set about to conquer the Promised Land. Blood flowed in rivers. The helpless fell before the sword like withered leaves before a driving gale; and when all that had lived were dead, the following account of the campaign of extermination was written in the fortieth verse of the tenth chapter of the book of Joshua: *"So Joshua smote all the country of the hills, and of the south, and of the vale, and of the springs, and all their kings: he left none remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the Lord God of Israel commanded."*

Read the awful book of Joshua. In it you will see an army, as ignorant and as brutal as ever drew the sword of war, advancing from city unto city where people dwell in peace enjoying liberty and love. You will see men and women of every age and rank falling before the strokes of death. Now the prattling babe smiles on the uplifted sword, and now he feels it running through his baby heart. All around you are the dying and the dead, and all that breathe must die. You hear the cries of anguish as you walk in human blood, and raising your eyes, you see beyond the fires of a burning town. Yet the Bible assures us that this, wholesale extermination of nation after nation was in obedience to instructions given by God!

The world regards the Kaiser, and justly, as infamous. History will brand him as one of the cold blooded, calculating monsters of the human race. But the Kaiser has been an assiduous student of the Bible. He has quoted it more frequently than all the monarchs of his time put together. He is thoroughly familiar with its gospel of force, its glorification of war. The name of its War God has ever been on his lips. In no other book could he have found such warrant for the crimes of his frightfulness. And who shall say that when he hurled his gray hordes at the throats of Belgium and France, he was not thinking, for example, of this precedent found in the second chapter of Deuteronomy: *"Rise ye up, take your journey, and pass over the river Arnon: behold I have given into thine hand Sihon the Amorite, king of Heshbon, and his land; begin to possess it, and contend with him in battle."*

But the Kaiser did not follow his biblical precedent to the letter, for the thirty-fourth verse of the chapter quoted says: *"And we took all his cities at that time, and utterly destroyed the men, and the women, and the little ones, of every city, we left none to remain."* The Kaiser, however much he may have been influenced by the Bible, though he killed as many men as he could, gave up the task of exterminating the women and children. In this respect the modern war-lord showed himself morally superior to his ancient model--Jehovah.

As a deeply religious man, with "God forever on his tongue," and the Bible at his pillow, the Kaiser has illustrated to the world the awful influence of that so-

called inspired book's warlike recitals when doted on by a crowned assassin dreaming of conquest. For, [that Wilhelm II was influenced by the Bible is beyond question; and his hireling clergy who defended his crime and promised him victory appealed to the same book.](#)

The Bible says, "*Thou shalt not kill,*" and then proceeds to recite a long and gruesome catalogue of murders, massacres and wars of conquest for which it claims the approval or command of God. Hence, the Bible is a dangerous moral guide.

The thirteenth chapter of Romans enjoins: "*Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.*" These words justify the basest political tyranny. According to these words, resistance to despots is rebellion against Deity. [The Bible would have us believe that the lovers of freedom who dethrone tyrants and establish republics are criminals in the sight of God!](#)

Lying, cheating, stealing, slavery, religious prosecution, cannibalism, murder, war and tyranny are but some of the crimes that the Bible sanctions and defends. In Abraham's preparation to sacrifice Isaac, in Jephthah's sacrifice of his daughter, in David's hanging of the seven sons of Saul, and in the law of the twenty-seventh chapter of Leviticus, [the Bible ranges itself on the side of human sacrifices.](#) In the lives of the patriarchs, of Gideon, of Saul, of David, of Solomon and in the statute in the twenty-first chapter of Deuteronomy, pertaining to the rights of the children of the hated wife, there is sanction of and legislation for polygamy. In the twenty-second chapter of Exodus is found the injunction: "*Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live,*" a line winged with the ignorant spirit of murder, that lit the fires during the Christian centuries under hundreds of thousands of innocent women charged with the impossible crime of witchcraft. In allowing a man to banish his wife at will, according to the twenty-first chapter of Deuteronomy, or to subject her to the barbaric test of jealousy, prescribed in the fifth chapter of Numbers, the Bible gives instances of its cruel subjection and degradation of women. As it upholds human sacrifices, polygamy, the witchcraft superstition and the brutal treatment of women, the Bible is a dangerous moral guide.

Where the moral teachings of the Bible are not pernicious, they are often worthless. As for example, the advice to take no thought for the morrow, to turn the other cheek to the smiter, to lend your goods to any borrower, to go two miles with the man who would compel you to go one, to sell all you have and give the proceeds to the poor, and other such counsels of perfection, which, if followed, would wreck and strand civilization.

In the face of all this, we are told that the Bible is inspired and holy, and the foundation of our civilization. What pious stupidity! Why is the world so backward today with all its boasted progress? Why have mankind not yet learned to live in peace and brotherhood? Because [for two thousand years the intellect of the world has been poisoned with the teachings of a book that glorifies nearly every crime against humanity;](#) because the church, instead of striving to develop the moral and intellectual resources of mankind, has enthralled the minds of men and women with the worship of the barbaric records of an uncivilized, tribal people. Says Professor Henry Sturt, of Oxford University, in '*The Idea of a Free Church*', "[Of all the terrible intellectual disasters of Europe the Bible has been by far the greatest](#)".

The truth is that the Bible is a dangerous moral guide, which if followed, would land men in the alms house or the penitentiary. All the language of exaggeration has been exhausted in praising that book, and yet that book has been the greatest enemy of the human race. It has been the enemy of liberty, the enemy of knowledge, the enemy of morality. That book helped largely to destroy the civilization of Greece and Rome. It gave Europe the long night of the dark ages. It made ignorance and cruelty universal. It enslaved millions. It drenched Christian lands with the blood of persecution. It caused countless religious wars. It filled millions of lives with sorrow, and covered countless faces with tears.

For the civilization we enjoy, we are indebted to the brave thinkers who fought against the ignorance and the abuses that are championed by the Bible. The world has advanced in spite of the repressive influence of its "*inspired*" book. Every educated minister knows this. **The best minds in the Church today take consolation from the fact that the Bible is not true.** The light is spreading everywhere. The clergy are apologizing. Superstition is surely fading from the mind. Freethought holds the allegiance of the world's best brains. The day is coming when mankind will own that while there are many good things in the Bible, its influence in the world proves it to have been an extremely dangerous moral guide.

Is the Bible the Best Moral Guide?

Merle Hertzler

<http://webpace.webring.com/people/xq/questioner/Bible3.htm>

So far we have seen that the verbal inspiration of the Bible is unproven. And we have seen that the Bible is sometimes mistaken. Now this does not necessarily mean that the Bible is bad. It just means that it is okay to question what we read.

You may be concerned where this is leading. Perhaps to you the Bible is the source of moral judgment. It is your only hope to find your way in life. You may wonder how anybody could attempt to chart his course through life without its moral compass. And you may be concerned that we are undercutting that hope. I can understand your concern. I once had similar views of the Bible. I still find passages in the Bible that are inspiring. But I find many other passages that I would question. And I find other books that are inspiring besides the Bible.

Perhaps you would claim that the comfort and guidance you receive from the Bible puts it in a class of its own, far above any other book. But is this really what we find consistently in the Bible? Let's see. Let's take a few minutes to look at the guidance that the Bible offers. Do we need the Bible's guidance to know what is right?

Let's begin by looking at Deut 22:11. It says, "You shall not wear a material mixed of wool and linen together". Do you follow that rule? Did you check the labels before you dressed this morning? I think you ignored this commandment today, just like I did. Why do we ignore it? I neglect it because I think it is unreasonable. Why did you neglect it? If the Bible is your source of guidance, why do you simply ignore this rule, and live as though it doesn't exist? Why would God care if we wore two kinds of fabric together? If you and I let reason override this rule, then it seems to me that **reason, not the Bible, is our ultimate guide.**

Many Christians have never read the whole Bible, and are not aware of the moral teachings that are found in it. Let's look at some. Exodus 23:19 tells us we cannot cook a baby goat in its mother's milk. Do you worry about keeping this commandment? Gen. 17:14 tells us a child is to be punished when his parents neglect to have him circumcised. Is that fair? Ex. 20:8-11, 31:15-17, 34:21, and 35:1-3 tell us that no work may be done on the Sabbath (Saturday) not even the lighting of a fire. The penalty is death. Do you recommend that we kill people who light a fire in their fireplace on Saturday? ^[1] Lev. 3:17 tells us that we may never eat fat. So how is it that we eat hamburgers without guilt? Lev. 27:1-7 tells us that males are more valuable than females. Do you agree? No? Then these verses are mistaken, aren't they? Num. 5:12-31, tells us that if a man suspects his wife has committed adultery, she is to be tested by making her drink water mixed with dirt. If she gets sick, she is guilty. Do you recommend that we implement this test procedure? I don't. Interestingly, there is no such test given for men. Is this fair? Deut. 22:5 tells us we may not wear clothing of the opposite sex. Do you think it is a sin for a woman to wear her husband's shirt? No? Then you disagree with Deuteronomy. Deut. 23:1 tells us that a man whose testicles are crushed may not enter the assembly of the Lord. Should we set up an inspection station at the church doors, asking every man to kindly drop his drawers for inspection, so we can keep injured people out? Or should we just pretend this verse isn't there? Deut. 25:11-12 tells us that a wife who grabs her husband's attacker by his private parts must have her hand cut off and is to be shown no pity. It does not matter that she was only trying to defend her husband. Do you agree? I could give many more examples. ^[2]

Many will simply ignore these verses, for they are in the Old Testament. **Christians that are quick to distance themselves from the Old Testament are apparently unaware of how closely the Old Testament^[3] is tied to the New Testament.**

For instance, Matthew 23:1-3 says,

"Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples, saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them."

Do you follow these verses? They tell you to do all that the Pharisees command you from the Law of Moses. Do you do everything the teachers of the law teach? And what about Matthew 5:18-20, which teaches that we should follow even the minor laws,

"For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. "Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. "For, I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven."

Is the law that forbids the mixing of fabrics one of the least of the laws? According to these verses, if you ignore the least of the laws, you will be called the least in the kingdom of heaven. So why do you ignore them?

Some say that Matthew 5 does not apply, for all "was accomplished" by Jesus. But if the author was trying to teach that this only applies until the death of Jesus, he used most unclear language. Besides, the book of Matthew was not written until years after Christ died. Why did Matthew even bother to write this? Is it not clear that when Matthew was writing this he expected his readers to believe they needed to keep the law if they wanted to be great in the kingdom of heaven? And so it appears that Matthew, writing long after the death of Christ, still expects that his readers need to keep the law in order to be great in the kingdom of heaven.

Even Paul writes, "Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law." (Rom 3:31) He also says, "For it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified." (Romans 2:13) So the New Testament simply does not distance itself from the Old Testament the way many hope.

Some New Testament verses do teach that keeping the Old Testament law is not necessary for salvation, but the question before us is not how to obtain salvation. The question is how to obtain moral guidance. **Do you agree that the Old Testament provides very faulty moral guidance? If so, why do the New Testament writers hold it in such high regard?**

Some people say it is okay if the Old Testament commands are faulty, for the Law of Moses was not intended to make us good, but to show us our sinfulness and our need of Christ. But how could a frivolous and immoral law prove we were sinful? If you want to measure moral character, do you not need a reliable moral standard? You surely do not think that the laws mentioned above represent a high standard of conduct, do you? For if you thought they were wise, I think you would be following them. If they are faulty, how can they be used to prove our sinful state? If the inspection gauge in the factory is faulty, you could not use it to prove the whole production run is flawed, could you? And isn't this whole view of the-law-as-teacher callused to the needs of the people before Christ? Why would God leave them with an inadequate law for centuries just to prove a point to us that would follow later on? Could it be that the Law of Moses did not come from God, but was, instead, an early attempt of primitive man to define morality?

Besides, if Jehovah did give the Law of Moses, and we find that this first system of his to be faulty, does that prove that his second plan, the gospel, is good? If an engineer gives you a defective design, and the building collapses, would you trust him with the redesign? If he told you he deliberately gave you a deficient design in order to prove that you really needed his improved design, would you buy his argument? I think not. You would look elsewhere. So if Jehovah's first covenant, the Law of Moses, is not good, why not look elsewhere? Why give Jehovah a second chance? (But I find no reason to believe this law was given by God. It seems more likely to me that it was an early attempt by primitive people to define morality.)

Slavery

Let's look at something more substantial than clothes or goat meat--the issue of slavery. Look at Exodus 21:2-7.

"If you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve for six years; but on the seventh he shall go out as a free man without payment. "If he comes alone, he shall go out alone; if he is the husband of a wife, then his wife shall go out with him. "If his

master gives him a wife, and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall belong to her master, and he shall go out alone. "But if the slave plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife and my children; I will not go out as a free man, 'then his master shall bring him to God, then he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him permanently. If a man sells his daughter as a female slave, she is not to go free as the male slaves do.'"

Do you have an opinion on the morality of this passage? Is it right to buy slaves, even if the period is limited to six years? What do you think about the poor women slaves? If the men could go free after six years, why should the women be slaves for life? And look at the condition that was placed on these male slaves obtaining their freedom. If a slave had married while in slavery, his wife and children could not leave with him. Only the man could leave. Should a decent man accept this offer and abandon his family as slaves? What kind of family values is that? And if the male slave does move on as allowed here, how can it possibly be right to force his wife and children to be slaves forever?

Do you have an ounce of respect for the father who takes his little girl--the one that cuddles in his lap at night and calls him "Daddy"--and sells her into lifelong slavery? Why does the Bible allow it? Is it really moral to sell one's own daughter, knowing that she and her children will become slaves for life? I can't even imagine a person thinking this is acceptable. Help me out here. What am I missing? Isn't it immoral to treat your daughter like this?

You may suggest that conditions were different back then, so God had different rules. But do you really believe that? Suppose you are watching a movie. You see the story of a slave owner who buys young ladies and young men as slaves. You watch as a man sells his own daughter to be a slave. You watch as the slave-owner "gives" this young girl to another slave as his wife. You watch as her slave "husband" walks off after six years, free of all responsibility, leaving her and the children as slaves. You watch their wretched, abandoned lives as slaves without a committed father or husband. How would you react? Do you approve of these actions? I think not. Would you approve if the movie was set in the 500 BC time frame, but disapprove if it was set at a later date? What does it matter when the movie was set? Slavery is slavery, no matter when it happens. And it seems to me that slavery is wrong. Do you not agree?

Look, the movie is still playing. Here comes the slave-girl's father walking down the path. Look closely, I think I see something. Yes, look at his coat. See it? It is pure wool! He has obeyed Deuteronomy 22. He has not mixed two kinds of fabric in his coat. Does this change your view of this man? Does the material of his coat change your attitude toward him? No? Then why does the Bible condemn people who wear the wrong combination of fabrics, while allowing slavery to continue? Do you really believe there was a time when slavery was fine but mixing materials in your clothing was sinful?

One of the worst practices conceived by humans was the act of owning slaves. And yet the Bible allows it. Although term limits were imposed on male Hebrew slaves, the same rights were not given to people of other nations. In Lev. 25:44-46 we read:

⁴⁴ As for your male and female slaves whom you may have--you may acquire male and female slaves from the pagan nations that are around you. ⁴⁵ Then, too, it is out of the sons of the sojourners who live as aliens among you that you may gain acquisition, and out of their families who are with you, whom they will have produced in your land; they also may become your possession. ⁴⁶ You may even bequeath them to your sons after you, to receive as a possession; you can use them as permanent slaves. But in respect to your countrymen, the sons of Israel, you shall not rule with severity over one another."

Is not something very wrong with this book? How can you carry a book to church that allows slavery? Do you want your children to read this book?

Death

There is a long list of sins in the Old Testament that carry the punishment of death, including homosexuality, adultery, and cursing parents. For instance:

⁹ *"If there is anyone who curses his father or his mother, he shall surely be put to death; he has cursed his father or his mother, his blood-guiltiness is upon him. ¹⁰If there is a man who commits adultery with another man's wife, one who commits adultery with his friend's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death...¹³If there is a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their blood-guiltiness is upon them."* (Lev. 20:9-10,13)

¹⁸ *"If any man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey his father or his mother, and when they chastise him, he will not even listen to them, ¹⁹ then his father and mother shall seize him, and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gateway of his hometown. ²⁰" They shall say to the elders of his city, 'This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey us, he is a glutton and a drunkard.'²¹" Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death; so you shall remove the evil from your midst, and all Israel will hear of it and fear"* [Deut. 20:18-21]

Do you suggest that we follow these commands, and kill such people? And do you suggest that we follow the law and not mix fabrics? No? Then Isaiah says you have no dawn. For Isaiah calls us to the law saying, "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn." (Isaiah 8:20) So Isaiah explains your problem. He says you have no dawn. You disagree with Isaiah, don't you?

Oh, you will tell me that Isaiah's message was temporary, that the Old Testament system was given only to help people out until the gospel would arrive. If the Old Testament was temporary, why doesn't it say so? Repeatedly the Old Testament declares that this system is to last forever. For instance:

Psalm 119:60 The sum of Your word is truth, And every one of Your righteous ordinances is **everlasting**.

2 Kings 17:37 The statutes and the ordinances and the law and the commandment which He wrote for you, you shall observe to do **forever**; and you shall not fear other gods.

Of course the law referred to in the above verses is the only law they had, that of Moses. But you disagree with these verses, don't you? You don't think that the

law against wearing mixed fabrics or the law commanding the killing of those who curse parents is eternal, do you? So the verses are wrong that say these ordinances are everlasting, aren't they?

The New Testament

Let's look at an example from the New Testament. Luke 6:30 says, "Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back. "Do you give to everyone that asks of you? If not, then you ignore this instruction. If you do follow this, and give to everybody that asks of you, then I will ask you for a thousand dollars, thank you. I suspect that everybody will ignore my request. It doesn't matter what Luke says, does it? Common sense says this is not a good thing to give to *everyone* that asks. So we ignore the written code, and go by our common sense. This indicates to me that our ultimate source of moral guidance comes from reason, not from the Bible.

Many will tell me Luke does not mean to give to everyone that asks--even though he says so--but that he is only asking us to be generous. Well, I agree that we should be generous. If this was the point, than that is what the writer should have said. He said, "Give to everyone who asks". In that he must surely be mistaken.

New Testament morality has many problems. Luke 14:26 tells us we cannot be disciples unless we hate our father, mother, and children. What kind of family values is that? (And you cannot get around that verse by telling me that it means "love less" instead of "hate." If the author meant "love less" why didn't he say what he meant?) Matt.10:34 says, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword." Do you agree that the world needs yet another sword?

How should a guest treat a host? Some might respond by asking, "What would Jesus do?" Well, what *would* Jesus do?

"Now when He had spoken, a Pharisee asked Him to have lunch with him; and He went in, and reclined at the table. When the Pharisee saw it, he was surprised that He had not first ceremonially washed before the meal. But the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the platter; but inside of you, you are full of robbery and wickedness. You foolish ones, did not He who made the outside make the inside also?" (Luke 11:37-40a)

So we find that, if Luke is to be believed, Jesus was sitting as a guest in a man's home, and his host was surprised that Jesus did not ceremonially wash his hands. And we are told that Jesus insulted his host. Is this the proper way to treat your host? You do not turn on your host with insults like this, do you? Is this the way you want your children to act when they are away from home?

And then there is the command of Romans 13:1-2 to obey the government, all government.

"Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves."

If we were to follow this passage, then we would be forced to always obey our government. And so it would have been wrong for the Northern Alliance to defy the Taliban, the American revolutionaries to declare independence from the British, and the people of the Soviet Union to resist the Communists. But most of us seem to honor someone who rebelled against a government. It seems to me that we allow them to ignore the verses because we know reason is a better source of moral instruction than biblical literalism.

Some will tell me that these verses are only a general rule to follow good governments, and that the command to obey God rather than man can override this rule. But notice the language of Romans 13. *Every* person is to be in subjection... There is *no* authority except from God... *whoever* resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God. That clearly includes everyone and every government. Now if the author had intended to say that *most* people should be in subjection to *most* governments, that *most* authority is from God, and that *most* people who resist the authority resist God, he could have said that. If he was trying to convey that idea with the words he wrote, than the author was incompetent. He should have said what he meant. He does not say there are *a few* authorities not from God. He says there is *no* authority except from God. When he emphasizes the universality of the command multiple times, how can people just ignore it and say he is only referring to some authority? But if these verses apply to all authority, then they are saying that the French Resistance to Hitler, and the American Revolution from England were wrong.

And so it goes. People regularly ignore the Bible if it is not to their liking. They assume it must not mean what it clearly says. Wouldn't it be more honest to accept that it means what it says, but it is wrong?

Atrocities

It gets worse.

Imagine that your child comes home from Sunday school and shows you the handout he was given. It says, "How blessed will be the one who seizes and dashes your little ones against the rock." It shows a picture of a baby being thrown against a rock with his head splitting open. How do you react? I am sure that you would be upset with that literature. You would never want your children to be taught this, would you? But, if your children carry a Bible to church, they carry those verses with them (Psalm 137:8-9). And those verses teach that the act of throwing babies against rocks is blessed in that instance. Those are two of the verses your children carry with them in the book they carry to Sunday school. Don't worry, your child will never actually be taught those verses in Sunday school. Those verses never seem to make the cut.

How can a holy book praise people that smash babies against the rocks? Yes, I understand that the writer was angry against his Babylonian captors, and he is writing in anger about the Babylonians. I can feel for his anger against the soldiers, slave drivers, and political leaders. I understand the hurt. But how can he say it was blessed to kill Babylonian babies? You surely do not approve of going to your enemy and killing his baby as an act of revenge, do you? Isn't that an act of terrorism? Why does the Bible praise this? I would say that this writer is morally confused. I would say he is praising something wrong.

If this were the only problem, I might be able to overlook it. But there are so many morally troubling verses. Do you doubt that? I have a suggestion. Tonight, start at Genesis and start reading. I am asking you to do what your pastor would ask you to do. Get into the word. Read it for yourself. You will be surprised.

Remember the story of the Passover? Moses keeps asking Pharaoh to let the people go from their bondage. Pharaoh refuses. Finally, according to the story, God comes up with a plan that breaks Pharaoh's will to fight. It involves sending an angel to kill all of the firstborn in Egypt. And we are told that this is exactly what happened-- *"There was a great cry in Egypt, for there was no home where there was not someone dead."* (Ex.12:30) No home survived? What a terrible slaughter. Maybe I should not play Monday morning quarterback--I was not there--but an idea comes to mind. Wouldn't it have been easier to threaten to kill Pharaoh? If he doesn't respond, kill him. Suppose his successor maintained the evil bondage. Ok, then you kill the next Pharaoh. How many Pharaohs do you need to kill until one of them will listen and end the brutal slavery? How do you like that plan? Isn't that more humane than killing thousands of innocent babies? Why not?

Imagine that you are watching the evening news. You see a picture of a missile being skillfully guided so that it misses the enemy bunker and slams into an orphanage. The reporter tells you that this is exactly where the missile was supposed to hit. The reporter describes the precision that was necessary to avoid the tanks and hit the babies. He tells you that these tactics will demoralize the opposition leaders, and cause them to submit to our requests. How would you react? You would be outraged, wouldn't you? When civilized countries fight modern warfare, they take special precautions to avoid killing babies.

But what happened in Exodus? If we believe the Bible, the big blow deliberately missed Pharaoh, missed the army command-and-control, and missed the slave drivers. Instead, we are told it was aimed specifically at the children. This is good? This is moral? Can you understand how I have come to the opinion that the writer of this passage was mistaken?

The slaughter of babies was a constant theme in the Old Testament. Repeatedly we are told that God sanctioned the slaughter of babies. For instance, In I Samuel 15 we read:

¹Then Samuel said to Saul, "The LORD sent me to anoint you as king over His people, over Israel; now therefore, listen to the words of the LORD. ²"Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he set himself against him on the way while he was coming up from Egypt. ³'Now go and strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has, and do not spare him; but put to death both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.'"

Can you imagine the gruesome scene (assuming it actually happened as recorded)? Hundreds of children would have been killed with the sword as they fled or cowered into a corner. Can you support such actions? Can you not see that it would be wrong to kill the infants in this way? Can you not see why many people think the Bible is mistaken to sanction such things?

Some will tell me that the killing of babies was okay, for God sanctioned it. But how do they know God sanctioned it? Isn't it possible that the writer was mistaken when he wrote that God said this?

Defenders of the Bible often resort to extreme moral relativism when they try to defend such verses. They try to declare that there is no intrinsic difference between right and wrong, and that all that matters is obeying God. So if the voice of God were to sanction rape, murder, slavery, or torture, they see no problem with doing those things. To them morality is all about obeying the rules, and has nothing to do with human moral judgment. But if this is the attitude they have, then they would equally follow an evil tyrant God as they would a good God. For if there is no intrinsic difference between right and wrong, if all that matters is that we perform our duty as directed from above, if there is no value in questioning whether the act is right, one would then be forced to follow a God even if he commanded the most horribly depraved deeds.

No, it seems to me that some things are indeed bad. Killing innocent babies is bad. And this passage commands the killing of innocent babies. Is not this passage wrong?

If a friend told you he heard a voice from the sky claiming to be God and telling him to kill babies, you would not tell him to do it, would you? You would doubt that it really was God who was speaking, wouldn't you? You would demand overwhelming evidence. Why do you not have the same skepticism when you approach I Samuel 15? For we have found no reason to assume this passage is inspired by God. Is it possible that this writer was mistaken when he thought God was sanctioning the killing of babies? Which is more likely? That the author was mistaken when he thought God was commanding him to kill babies, or that a sovereign God of the universe was commanding the slaughter of innocent babies?

So it seems to me that the writers of the Bible sometimes presented a depraved morality.

The Good Parts

You may tell me that the Bible has many good parts. I agree. But much of the good teaching of the Bible is also found in other books that were written before the Bible. For instance, here is the Golden Rule as taught by others before Jesus:

“What is hateful to you, do not to your fellow man. That is the entire law; all the rest is commentary.” (Talmud, Shabbat 31a - thirteenth century B.C.)

“Surely it is the maxim of loving kindness: Do not do unto others what you would not have them do unto you.” (Analects 15:23 - sixth century B.C.)

“May I do to others as I would that they should do to me” (Plato, fourth century B.C.)

So we find that many people taught the Golden Rule long before Jesus. The Bible was not original when it proposed this idea. There have been many good books about morals.

I am for high moral standards. I am in favor of kindness, and love, and the rule of law. I am not convinced that the standard of morality that I see in the Bible is better than the standard that I reach by reason. That is why I choose reason.

Notes

1. Sunday worship does not qualify as Sabbath keeping. Matthew 28:1 makes it clear that Easter Sunday was the day after the Sabbath, making it clear that the

Sabbath is Saturday. Besides, the Sabbath as described in the law refers to not working, and does not refer to a day of worship.

2. Much of the content of this paragraph was derived from Donald's Morgan's excellent list, which can be found *here*.

3. I use the term "Old Testament" because that is the term my intended audience uses for the Jewish scriptures. I mean no offense to followers of Judaism, who sometimes do not like the connotation of the name.

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