

Three Supposed Difficulties in the Books of Moses

Innumerable articles, dissertations, and books have been published on three problems that intellectuals encounter in the Mosaic scriptures. These are the entry and transmission of sin, the sacrifice of Isaac, and the command to annihilate the Canaanites. (Not that these three are the only problems with Scripture that intellectuals have!) There should not be, in my mind, any difficulty with these three matters, as I will attempt to show in this lesson. Let's look at each of these.

I. Sin. There's only one verse in the Bible that explains what occurred in the Garden at the fall, and that's Romans 5:12, "Just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, whereupon all sinned." Adam, of course, is the one man Paul refers to, and so all humans since then are constituted sinners. The problem with this is not so deep. Let's think about it.

(a) For one thing, unbelievers say, "It's unfair that because of the failing of one man long ago, everyone since then should have to be condemned." For another, where did "sin" come from and how is it transmitted to everyone? So, first, what's unfair? God is just, infinitely and perfectly just. We'd never know what justice is apart from God. No one in his right mind should accuse God of being unfair, for by so doing, that person reveals his own foolishness. As the head of the human race, all humans on earth from that day to today are Adam's offspring. We are a community, better, a family; and we all bear Adam's nature. We are a corporate unity, with Adam as our head. Adam's rebellion necessitated God distorting Adam's created goodness with an enslaving inclination to sin. And so, sinners, all of us, and under judgment because of sin, we have only God's mercy to seek in life. In His exhaustive omniscience, God knew that if anyone else had been there in the Garden instead of Adam, we all would have rebelled against God's clearly stated warning, indeed, against His character as a wise and good Creator and Ruler. Under those same circumstances, every one of us humans would have done exactly as Adam did. God's judgment is just.

(b) Second, exactly how is sin transmitted? Answer: Who knows? That's not revealed in Scripture. It's unknowable. Speculations abound, but all are in vain. We need to humbly accept that we're all sinners in need of what God has graciously provided, a Savior. Our Savior is a new, better, second Adam, and what God offers us is to be united to Him in a new and better corporate unity, one that has righteousness as its defining characteristic, rather than sin. And so we are rescued from that condemnation. See Romans 5:18-19. We're such individualists that we fail to grasp God's intention for us. As the Godhead is a unity, the human race was supposed to be that too, reflecting God's glory. Sin in the Adamic body blocked that, but in Christ we're able to realize it. We're distinct individuals identifying with each other in love and peace as an organic unity. (Thus the personal or private sins of any believer harm the body, blocking blessing and/or useful service.) By the way, sin is not a "nature." Our "nature" is our humanity. Sin *corrupts* our nature. It's not correct to refer to our having a "sin nature" for a very good reason: The Son took upon Himself a real human nature, and that "nature" was not a sinful one.

II. The Binding of Isaac. Unbelievers find it appalling that God, who elsewhere forbade child sacrifice, would demand that Abraham kill his son, Isaac, as an act of worship. Let's think about this. For one thing, this is a unique and singular event in all Scripture. Abraham was a unique person and his role was unique. And God's dealing with him is unique. It's not surprising, therefore, that God should create such an extraordinary test as this. And let's understand, too, that although Abraham didn't know that he wouldn't have to go through with it, God did. And there's this: Even if Abraham did have to sacrifice Isaac, Abraham evidently was aware that God would work a miracle and raise Isaac from the dead. The text suggests that. But what's most important in this is, Abraham's faith in God, his love for God, was being tested. Adam had to be tested. Abraham, who would be God's agent to take the knowledge of salvation to all people on earth, had to be tested too. The test, in essence, is obedience. We really need to get this: Faith and love for God **MUST** be expressed by obedience to God's clearly stated will. Our love for God and our trust in Him must take priority over, or supersede, anything else in life we love or value or deem important or that we desire or want. Biblical love (or trust, believing) is always – *always* – expressed in obedience regardless what loss or sacrifice we personally suffer. Whereas Adam failed, Abraham didn't. Abraham had to demonstrate by obedience to God that he loved and had perfect confidence in God's Word. So must we.

III. Annihilation of the Canaanites. Unbelievers assume that it was because of their ethnicity that God commanded Israel to wipe out the Canaanites from the land. No, it was because of their wickedness. But unbelievers can't accept that. Neither can they accept that God is the Author of life. God owns us. We're His property. And so He has the sovereign right to dispose of us as He wills, that is, according to His holy will. We have no claim on life. The notion that we do is a

delusion. "In Him we live and move and have our being." God has stated in His Word how we're to live before Him, in His presence. If we defy Him, only deserved condemnation awaits. The physical world bears testimony to God as Creator and sustainer. We're therefore without excuse. Unbelievers take as their maxim for life, "I am my own." Tragically, believers, too many of us, suppose that we're likewise "our own" to live as we please, according to our own desires and will. That too is a delusion, held, sadly, by people who should know better. We're NOT our own. God owns us by creation and by redemption. "You are not your own; you were bought at a price." We are so wrapped up in the nitty-gritty of life that we miss the great reality that all life is to be pursued to please and love and serve the One who bought us. If not, well, God has the sovereign right to dispose of us according to His holy will.

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Everything in Scripture is there for us to learn something necessary for our pursuit of godliness. Several important lessons emerge from this brief study. We need to heed these lessons more than we need to know apologetics.

(1) We need to understand how tenaciously sin grips us. Sin influences our thinking, our values, our desires, our beliefs . . . everything. We need to totally change our minds, in every dimension of life and character, so that we think God's thoughts. "Let this mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus . . ." "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind . . ." Only the Holy Spirit has the power to enable us to mortify the sinful desires that control us. So let us yield to Him and – yes, this too – know the Word of God to give the Spirit something in us to work with. If we love God and seek to honor Him, we'll despise sin, in all its ugliness and scope and, instead, embrace righteousness and seek with all our might (empowered by the Spirit) to live it. And we must be continually, daily, grateful to Jesus for His intercession on our behalf, because we fail that often. Do we realize how totally dependent we are on the on-going work of Christ on our behalf? If so, let's show our gratitude in loving, fruitful servanthood.

(2) There's no such thing as worship without personal sacrifice. We easily deceive ourselves into supposing that 2 hours of passive spectatorship on Sunday morning is "worship." Worship is loving God, serving God, obeying God, giving of ourselves to God, and being holy. Abraham is our spiritual father if we are like him, believing and obeying God. What sacrifice we must make isn't for me to say. That is something God decides for each person. It isn't simply putting some of our disposable income in a box (see Luke 21:1-4). The problem is, we don't want to make *any* personal sacrifice, so whatever it is that God in love has for us never even reaches the level of our consciousness. Tragic.

(3) What does it mean to us that God is sovereign? Is it just good theology? Is it simply too abstract to mean anything? I suspect that we completely miss the practical meaning of it. God's sovereignty means He has all authority over our lives. We're not little gods, though we too often try to live like we are. God has the absolute right to stipulate how we're to live and how we're to be in our character, and demand adherence; and the right to enforce His authority in His way and in His time. We've been given responsibilities; they're there in the Word. And God has the absolute right to expect adherence. We can't be sloppy about this! We can't be complacent either, which we easily are in the supposition that God is all-forgiving and gracious and our eternal blessings are secure. We mustn't be indifferent either. God deliberately gave us the Word so that we know what's expected of us. So let's commit afresh to knowing and living out His Word, to His glory.

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Something else. Implicit in this and all Sunday School lessons, indeed, in all Church preaching and teaching and, for that matter, in all Scripture, is this: We're here to walk with God. And that requires a lot on our part, such as full-time and life-long commitment, faithful study of the Word and reflection on how to apply it to our lives, continual awareness of how pervasive sin is and the necessary repentance it should result in, and more. It also requires a love for God that transcends any human understanding of love, Christ's kind of love that comes to us from the indwelling Spirit of Christ. This is why the Scriptures have so much to say on how we're to live godly. We (wrongly) suppose that all we have to do is confess belief in Christ and . . . that's it! We then can go on living as we had been. No. Trusting in Christ is only the entry at the narrow gate. What then must follow is a long walk along the narrow path, walking with God in holiness and purposefulness. Jesus stated in Matthew 7:13-14, "small is the gate and narrow the path that leads to life, and only a few find it." There's first a gate (trusting Christ for salvation at a point in one's life), then the path (life-long pursuit of sanctification, mortification, serving, faithfulness, obedience, etc). We need to be faithful.