

God – our Moral Authority

God – “Taking us to School each Day”

Jesus as Moral Teacher: Where does this leave us?

ONE: Our research presents us with a serious 'Reality Check':

1. Jesus was **not embarrassed or disturbed by** His constant and clear teaching that His Father was the ultimate source/author of every scrap of the Hebrew Bible, and:
2. He was **not embarrassed or disturbed by** His constant and clear teaching that His Father was the YHWH in every event of the Hebrew Bible that involved YHWH, and:
3. He was **not embarrassed or disturbed by** His constant and clear teaching that ALL of the OT endorsed Him and His two appearances on the earth—one of creating possibility and means of rapprochement with God, and a subsequent one of judgment, forced redress of grievances, and excision of anti-citizens from the New Future/Community and removal of anti-children from the New Future/Universe.
4. He was **not embarrassed or disturbed by** His constant and clear teaching that future actions of Himself and of His Father would include judgment-class actions of forcefulness, discomfort, and final abandonment of the treacherous and relationship-hating saboteurs to the FULL consequences of their character and of the imprint of that character on the history and lives of others (and themselves).

Jesus as Moral Teacher: Where does this leave us?

TWO: Who is our Moral Authority?

- ❑ Do we REALLY trust Jesus for moral perfection, authority, exemplar?
 - His perfection?
 - ❖ Have we wrestled with His human experiences?
 - Frustration?
 - Anticipation of the Cross?
 - The fig tree?
 - Harsh rebukes?
 - ❖ Have we wrestled with His statements about His future actions in Judgment?
 - His authority?
 - ❖ Do we trust His judgment, in His acceptance of the OT events?
 - His example as role-model?
 - ❖ Do we try to emulate that in our lives – with Him as exemplar?

- ❑ Do we REALLY trust Father for moral perfection, authority, exemplar?
 - The Problem of Natural Evil?
 - The Problem of Predation in Nature?
 - The Problems caused by His patience and hopefulness?

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TWO: Who is our Moral Authority – and who makes counter-claims?

- ☐ Scoffers – no analysis, no argument, just ‘unjustified ridicule’...
- ☐ Slanderers – some consciously so; some just superficial in knowledge
- ☐ Colonizers – putting truth into service for worldly-only goals
- ☐ Relative – izers -- (what is true for YOU might not be true for Me)
- ☐ Re-interpreters - ('there's glory for you' – Humpty Dumpty)
- ☐ Distracters – by sensuality or by stress
- ☐ Bullies and Despots – ('My truth will be enforced')
- ☐ Those that paint with glitter...
- ☐ "Peace at all costs" (*the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable*)

- ☐ **Us – ("we have met the enemy, and he is us" – Pogo, 1971)**

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THREE: Worshipping in both SPIRIT and TRUTH...

☐ In Spirit - Passion of the Heart

- Trust
- Gratitude
- Expectation of Finding Goodness
- Recognition of required effort at staying honest and staying open

☐ In Truth – Peace of Conscience

- True view of God
 - Not our 'culturally-conditioned' construction
 - Not just appearances but also disclosures (e.g. His emotive statements and commentary)
- True view of His works
 - The real story – “God—not the devil—is in the details, here”
 - The real context – Death of Egyptian Firstborn (69,000 one time); Death of Jewish males via systemic, government mandated infanticide (midpoint of 2.75 million, 40K more per year, on-going)
 - The real constraints -- what options are open in the setting and the era?

Jesus as Moral Teacher: Where does this leave us?

FOUR: Disturbing / Horrific / Extreme Events in the Bible

- ❑ How does God expect us to respond EMOTIONALLY to them?
 - He is not one-dimensional, and we should not be!
 - No Ostrich tactics: "There is no problem that cannot be solved by MORE sand"
 - He is not 'happy' about judgment, and He warns us to not be either.
- ❑ How does God expect us to respond INTELLECTUALLY to them?
 - Avoid 'hasty conclusions' and 'snap judgments'
 - *If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame. [Proverbs 18:13]*
 - Watch for value-laden terms, *a la* Spin Doctors...
 - Fairness is critical: Both/All sides
 - *"The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him." [Proverbs 18:17]*
- ❑ How does God expect us to respond AS HIS CHILDREN to them?
 - A 5th-grade boy when told an embarrassing story about his dad...
 - And later as an adult son – 'not the whole story, I bet..'

Jesus as Moral Teacher: Where does this leave us?

FOUR: Disturbing / Horrific / Extreme Events in the Bible

❑ He is not 'happy' about judgment ...

Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord GOD, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live? ... For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord GOD; so turn, and live." [Ezek 18:23, 32]

Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live [Ezek 33:11]

"for he does not afflict from his heart or grieve the children of men. La 3:33

"By means of a rhetorical question, which anticipates an unequivocal negative response, Ezekiel spells out the basis for the exiles' hope: Yahweh's fundamental commitment is to human life, not to death. He finds no joy in anyone's death, not even that of a wicked person... What a remarkable declaration of divine patience and mercy this is.

"Yahweh's offer of life is gracious in the extreme, but it is both principled and contingent. Among the laws by which his justice is administered is the law of human freedom. Yahweh will not impose his grace on a rebellious people. They must accept responsibility for both the course of their lives and their destiny. Without repentance God cannot forgive and the death sentence remains inevitable. But where repentance occurs, grace triumphs and the sinner is granted life, full and abundant.

[Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*]

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❑ ... and He warns us to not be either.

Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and let not your heart be glad when he stumbles, lest the LORD see it and be displeased, and turn away his anger from him. [Pr 24:17–18.]

“God resents it when you gloat at another’s suffering (17:5), so much so that he might suspend your enemy’s punishment just to deprive you of your smug glee. Since the suffering results from God’s wrath, it must be a punishment for an offense, not an accidental misfortune. This teaches that you must not take pleasure in suffering even if it is deserved.

Prov 20:22 warns against seeking revenge or even intending to do so. The present maxim goes further, condemning an unworthy feeling even when it does not lead to vengeance. ...

Why is *schadenfreude* thought to anger God? Perhaps God resents others enjoying an event in which he himself takes no pleasure. Perhaps *schadenfreude* is a sign of arrogance, as if the rejoicer were imagining himself taking God’s side against his own enemies.” [Fox, Proverbs]

“God is disgusted with those who **gloat** over someone’s failure. Gloating over the disasters experienced by the poor is condemned in 17:5; in 24:17 gloating is not even permitted when an **enemy** has a problem. Gloating may cause God to side with one’s enemy and to withdraw **His wrath ... from** that enemy. God hates gloating because it suggests a superior attitude over others.” [Buzzell, Proverbs, BKC]

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FIVE: How does a follower of Jesus approach these?

1. As trials – like the other types in our lives (e.g. choices, relationships, \$, etc.)

Initial stress -> request for help -> patience while searching -> vetting solution -> praise, sharing, and 'travelogue'.
2. First Corinthians 13: "believe the best, but rejoice in truth" –
3. Innocent until proven guilty?
4. Judge not by appearances ... test all things ...

- **"Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment"** [Jesus, John 7:24]
- **"Test everything; hold fast what is good"** [Apostle Paul, 1 Thess 5:21]

5. Watch for deceptive spin – *a la Genesis 3* ... Spin: Restriction, not Protection.

Jesus as Moral Teacher: Where does this leave us?

FIVE: How does a follower of Jesus approach these?

6. With a trusting heart, based on a mixture of personal experience and personal conviction
 - a. Has He built an audit trail / trend line with you? What is more reasonable to expect?

Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for **I shall again praise him**, my salvation and my God. [Ps 42.11]
 - b. Anchor points:
 - The 'internal elements' of the Cross,
 - Where does morality ORIGINATE?
7. Understand that your experience has been and will be replicated by others—many times. (1 Corinthians 10:13 again)
8. Three outcomes:
 - a. Truth with peace of mind
 - b. Uncertainty (not resolved, but 'defused'—objection cannot be sustained) with peace of mind
 - c. "Repeat as needed" // "Repeat as forced" (lol)

Jesus as Moral Teacher: Where does this leave us?

SIX: A couple of examples (1):

Underlying Heart in the Midst of Justice/Judgment—the ‘Self-Conflicted God’

Hos 11.1-11	But since my people refuse to return to me, they will return to Egypt and will be forced to serve Assyria. War will swirl through their cities; their enemies will crash through their gates. They will destroy them, trapping them in their own evil plans. For my people are determined to desert me. They call me the Most High, but they don't truly honor me. "Oh, how can I give you up, Israel? How can I let you go? How can I destroy you like Admah or demolish you like Zeboiim? My heart is torn within me, and my compassion overflows. No, I will not unleash my fierce anger. I will not completely destroy Israel, for I am God and not a mere mortal. I am the Holy One living among you, and I will not come to destroy. For someday the people will follow me.
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"The menacing tone of the oracle switches in v. 8, presenting a rare glimpse of God on the verge of destroying the son Ammi, yet balking at the prospect. According to deuteronomic law, both parents could condemn a stubborn, rebellious son before the elders of the city, whereupon he would be stoned to death (Deut 21:18–21). This legal background illuminates the theological intent of v. 8, where God is about to hand over the son to be stoned. God cannot deal with the son in the same way God treated Admah and Zeboiim, two cities destroyed like Sodom and Gomorrah (Deut 29:23). Yahweh's abhorrence of the son's death penalty gives way to a growing compassion. Ultimately, the mother/father God makes a decision: "I will not execute my fierce anger;/ I will not again destroy Ephraim" (11:9a). Although the parent has the legal right to have the son killed, compassion for and bonding with the child prevent God from doing so. God transcends human legal institutions, which enforce the death sentence for disobedient sons, proclaiming "for I am God and no mortal,/ the Holy One in your midst,/ and I will not come in wrath" (11:9b)	NIB
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Jesus as Moral Teacher: Where does this leave us?

SIX: A couple of examples (2):

Underlying Heart in the Midst of Justice/Judgment—the ‘Self-Conflicted God’

Jer 48.29-33	We have all heard of the pride of Moab, for his pride is very great. We know of his lofty pride, his arrogance, and his haughty heart. I know about his insolence,” says the LORD, “but his boasts are empty— as empty as his deeds. So now I wail for Moab; yes, I will mourn for Moab. My heart is broken for the men of Kir-hareseth. “You people of Sibmah, rich in vineyards, I will weep for you even more than I did for Jazer. Your spreading vines once reached as far as the Dead Sea, but the destroyer has stripped you bare! He has harvested your grapes and summer fruits. Joy and gladness are gone from fruitful Moab. The presses yield no wine. No one treads the grapes with shouts of joy. There is shouting, yes, but not of joy.
"God expressed His concern for Moab as He mourned for Kir Hareseth (cf. Isa. 16:7, 11), another of her chief cities. Borrowing from Isaiah 16:9, Jeremiah indicated that God would weep along with the city of Jazer for the vines of Sibmah which had been destroyed."	
"Because of the impending judgment, the Lord through his prophet expresses his compassion and sorrow for his creatures , the Moabites"	
BKC, EBC	

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SIX: A couple of examples (3):

Underlying Heart in the Midst of Justice/Judgment—the ‘Self-Conflicted God’

The "Self-conflicted" God? (intra-Triune intercession)

Rom 8.26,27,34 and Hebr 7.25; for Peter in Luke 22.31	<p>And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don't know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers* in harmony with God's own will...Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God's right hand, pleading for us. ...</p> <p>Therefore he is able, once and forever, to save those who come to God through him. He lives forever to intercede with God on their behalf...</p> <p>Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift each of you like wheat. 32 But I have pleaded in prayer for you, Simon that your faith should not fail. So when you have repented and turned to me again, strengthen your brothers."</p>
"Barth observes that God " makes himself our advocate with himself , that he utters for us that ineffable groaning, so that he will surely hear what we ourselves could not have told him, so that he will accept what he himself has to offer"	EBC

Jesus as Moral Teacher: Where does this leave us?

SIX: A couple of examples (4):

Underlying Heart in the Midst of Justice/Judgment—the ‘Self-Conflicted God’

Deut 5.29	The LORD heard the request you made to me. And he said, ‘I have heard what the people said to you, and they are right. Oh, that they would always have hearts like this, that they might fear me and obey all my commands! If they did, they and their descendants would prosper forever. Go and tell them, “Return to your tents.” But you stand here with me so I can give you all my commands, decrees, and regulations. You must teach them to the people so they can obey them in the land I am giving them as their possession.’ ”
"With an outburst of emotion , the Lord added, “Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever!” The best interests of his people are deep in the heart of God. This view of divine compassion shows how the Lord’s love focuses on what is best for his people. Here is no vindictive god in contrast to a loving NT Lord. No, this glimpse into the heart of God is in harmony with the most compassionate depictions of Christ in the NT.	
EBC	

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SIX: A couple of examples (5,6):

Sending lying spirits (1 Kings 22)

But telling the target that they are lying...? [lol]

Elisha and the child-killing bears (2 Kings 2)

- The 'kids' are Elisha's age or OLDER
- They are from the elite class, middle-managers in the rival cult and/or mercenary force guarding the pagan temple.
- 50 of them roaming the woods, at just the 'right time'??
- Meeting a (similar) fate as the prophet of the Lord who disobeyed previously [except no record of deaths]
- "Baldness" accusation was not against his physical appearance!
- Violence against YHWH's prophets rampant

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SEVEN: Where to Go from Here... Roads already traveled by others

Some of the ones I have personally wrestled with / worked through / found grace and truth in:

(just a sample of titles from the Thinktank, relevant to the OT):

1. How could a God of Love order the massacre/annihilation of the Canaanites?
2. How can God allow 'natural' evil to occur?
3. God apparently set humanity up for failure in the Garden, so doesn't this show Him to be cruel, schizoid, or psychotic?
4. But isn't "Penal Substitution" actually illegal (if not immoral)??
5. God is Wrathful, Vengeful, Jealous, and Angry every day--and you want me to have a relationship with Him?!
6. Shouldn't the butchering of the Amalekite children be considered war crimes?
7. What about God's cruelty against the Midianites?
8. Was God being evil when He killed all the firstborn in Egypt?
9. Why didn't God stop the process before it started, if He knew of the massive amounts of suffering that would befall many of His creatures??

And We End Up Back Here Again – But Wiser

In obedience, trust, and loyalty to Jesus, we must face the ‘atrocities’ passages, since Jesus has taught us and clearly demonstrated to us that they are in fact NOT the ‘work of Satan’ operating under the name of YHWH.

But rather that they are – somehow and in important aspects -- manifestations of the character and values of the Father/Son/Spirit, and faithfully contain teachings from the God of grace, patience, justice, loyalty, compassion, and eventual deliverance from all evil-doers, both human and angelic.

And we know we can Rest assured...

That if OUR hearts—as being shaped by the love of God’s work in our lives, into the image of HIS HEART—are troubled by passages in His word, then SO MUCH MORE was His heart troubled.

Moral failures have dulled our hearts—we don’t experience life at the intense level of His untainted and undiminished emotional core.

He will grieve with us—and BEYOND US—because He is love ...

So, trust Him and look for His goodness and wisdom in even THESE passages – and He will lead good hearts to the truth, the good, and the glorious.