

IS THE BIBLE BAD FOR MORALITY? ¹

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In his book *The God Delusion* Richard Dawkins writes,

“The ethnic cleansing begun in the time of Moses is brought to bloody fruition in the book of Joshua, a text remarkable for the bloodthirsty massacres it records and the xenophobic relish with which it does so.” ²

Dawkins continued elsewhere,

“The god of the Old Testament has got to be the most unpleasant character in all fiction. Jealous and proud of it, petty, vindictive, unjust, unforgiving, racist. An ethnic cleanser urging his people on to acts of genocide.” ³

In his book *Godless: How An Evangelical Preacher Became One of America's Leading Atheists*, Dan Barker devotes an entire chapter to 'The Bible and Morality'. ⁴ He says Christians cherry-pick the bits of the Bible that are acceptable in today's Western society and reject the primitive bits of the Old Testament that are no longer culturally acceptable.

Barker cites many OT examples where he accuses God of bad morals. He cites the case of those young men who were mocking the prophet Elisha --- “Baldy, go up you old bald headed man!”--- and how the prophet cursed them in the Name of the LORD, and how God sent two female bears from the bush to tear the 42 lads to pieces (2 Kings 2:23-25).

Barker also cites the hapless farmers of Bethshemesh who “rejoiced to see” the ark of the covenant the Philistines had taken as booty in war over Israel. When they opened the lid of the box and looked inside, God smote them for their terrible sin. Indeed, 50,070 men were slaughtered “with a great slaughter” (I Sam. 6).

Barker says, “these men were trying to worship this very god, in their own way. Wouldn't a God of mercy understand their innocent mistake? What if one of my children gave me a birthday card with words, “Daddy, I luv you” and I punished them for spelling the word wrong?” ⁵

Barker goes on to say things like how God discriminates against the disabled, citing Leviticus 21:18-23,

“For no-one who has a defect shall approach: a blind man, or a lame man, or he who has a disfigured face, or any deformed limb, or a man who has a broken foot or broken hand, or a hunchback or a dwarf, or one who has a defect in his eye, or eczema or scabs or crushed testicles.”

Barker has a field day with the questions of slavery in the Bible, the death penalty for picking up a few sticks for firewood (thus breaking the Sabbath day), and of course --- along with Dawkins --- the “ethnic cleansing” under Joshua when Israel slaughtered the Canaanites when they invaded the Promised land.

Yes, it's fair to say critics of the Bible are having a field day when it comes to the Bible and morality. They tell us the Bible is bad for society, because it is xenophobic, homophobic, glorifies war and genocidal violence, teaches that all men are warped by Original Sin, and deserve everlasting torment in the fires of hell for failure to obey its moral precepts. And, if we are honest, we have to admit there are some frightfully violent and deeply disturbing

¹ These are the notes of the third message in the series *The Bible: Sad Hoax or Solid Hope?* delivered at the Mardon Road Church of Christ (Life & Advent) Hamilton, New Zealand on 18/9/2016. Once again, I ask the reader to realise the style is for public address and not primarily intended for literary finesse!

² Dawkins, Richard. *The God Delusion*, Bantam Press, 2006, p247

³ Ibid, p31

⁴ Barker, Dan. *Godless: How an Evangelical Preacher Became One of America's Leading Atheists*. Ulysses Press, 2008.

⁵ Ibid, p173

stories and examples in the Bible. There is no getting around this. So, perhaps after all the critics are right --- the Bible is bad for morality?

THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

A lot of these themes so unacceptable to the skeptic and atheist are found in the Book of Joshua. So, let's take a closer look at Joshua's account of the conquest of Canaan. The first thing to do is to find the Bible's own explanation for the invasion. This of course, is something our unbelieving friends do not do. After all, if you accept the Bible's account of the war in Canaan (which they want to), but reject the Bible's pretext for that war (which they don't), then it proves the skeptic is operating with double standards. There are two sides to the one coin, but they are only looking at one side ... doing a bit of cherry-picking of their own!

When Israel, under Joshua's command, entered the Promised Land, they were a formidable nation under God. God told Israel they would dispose the local tribes from Canaan. On the surface it sounds like a later justification for a brutal national land grab. But here is the reason God Himself gives for the conquest:

“In order that they do not teach you to emulate their abominations that they have done for their gods ... for even their sons and their daughters they burn in fire to their gods” (Deut. 20:18; 12:31).

So, when judging the “genocide” accusation, we need to seriously register this fact. The Canaanites practised burning their children alive in sacrifices to their gods. God through Israel was showing zero tolerance for their cherished practice of child sacrifice. God had had enough of the screams of Canaanite children in the flames! But the locals were not going to give up their land nor their wicked and abominable practices without a fight:

“And Joshua made war a long time with all these kings. There was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel except the Kivri, the persons of Givon” (Josh. 11:18-19).

Now don't rush over this. It appears like an afterthought, like a little editorial footnote, but what a world of light it sheds. We learn here that one city, Kivri, made peace with Joshua. Now, in offering terms of peace Joshua was not abrogating God's demands. The cities were offered peace if they were prepared to turn from their abominations. Their wicked practises were to cease in God's land. All other cities in Canaan refused these terms and so were punished. That was their choice; accept God's terms and be spared, or refuse God's holy demands and perish.

Let me illustrate what is happening here. Suppose you have just moved into a new house in a new neighbourhood. To your horror during your first night there, you are awoken from your sleep by ear-piercing screams of children yelling and crying next door. You try to put those distress cries out of your mind. Perhaps the children are having nightmares? You roll over and try to sleep.

But the next night those same distressing screams of children come from your neighbour's house again. This goes on for all week. You make discreet enquiries and you discover the cause. Dad is busy abusing his daughters while mum gets her pleasure by snuffing out her cigarette butts on junior. You discover the kids are going to school with bruises and burns. The kids are showing signs of sleep-deprivation and serious mental disturbance.

You are now faced with a choice. You can ignore it all, stick ear plugs in, and just let the nightly screams go on. But that non-action makes you complicit in the crimes. Turning a deaf ear would make you complicit in that child abuse. There is not a decent person who would not judge you a monster for your inaction. Now, imagine your dismay, when you find the whole neighbourhood involved in these kinds of abuses and abominable behaviours.

I imagine that even avowed atheists like Dawkins or Barker would recoil at this and would not remain inert.

That's what Joshua found when he entered Canaan! So the Canaanites were offered repentance and peace on God's terms with the chance to live as decent citizens, or get out. If the world had taken a lesson from these Biblical principles, we would have been spared the atrocities of Hitler (remember Chamberlain's appeasement at any price?) Pol Pot, Idi Amin, Stalin and others. It's wicked to turn a blind eye of indifference to evil.

We face that in our society right now. We have immigrants coming into our countries who practice things like female genital mutilation (female circumcision), honour killings (when a girl marries a man from another religious group and is murdered), wife beating, polygamy, etc. Will we tolerate that and say, "Oh, it's just their culture"? No, there are some things in all cultures that deface the image of God in humanity and must be treated. It would not do to reason, "Oh well, it's their custom. Why should we impose our values on them?"

Not all of God's standards suit our culture, either. We don't need the skeptics and unbelievers to tell us that not all of God's standards are congenial to our tastes. Our culture says, "What wrong with a few drinks too many?" God says, "Be not drunk with wine wherein is excess." Our culture says, "What's wrong with a boy and a girl shacking up together before they marry? You gotta try before you buy!" Our culture says, "What's wrong with devoting your life's work and energy to building your own financial castle, and it doesn't matter if you cheat the tax department or your neighbour with oppressive practices." Our culture says, "What's wrong with reading the stars. What's your star sign in the Zodiac?" God says, "Why consult the stars when you can consult Me, the Creator of the universe?"

And so God warned Israel, that if they abandoned God's just and good standards, they too would be judged,

"Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived and you turn and serve other gods and worship them. Then the anger of the Eternal God will be kindled against you and He will shut up the heavens, and there will be no more rain and the ground will not yield its fruit; and you shall perish off the good land that the Eternal God gives to you" (Deut. 11:16-17).

And God's holy requirements have not changed in the New Testament either:

"Do not be deceived. Those who practice immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envyings, drunkenness, carousings and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not enter the kingdom of God" (Gal. 5:19-21).

Yes, the Canaanites were on notice that God would not tolerate their wickedness. God offered them terms of peace if they would change. But in fairness, Israel was also put on notice. If Israel adopted the wickedness of the surrounding peoples, God would severely punish them also. God was not playing ethnic favourites here. So the war in Canaan was not about xenophobic genocide. The book of Joshua makes this clear ... let's see ...

RAHAB.

The story of Rahab the Canaanite prostitute is well known. This story appears at the very beginning of Joshua's conquest. This woman of ill-repute has heard stories about the God of Israel and she knows judgment is coming to Jericho. When the Israelite spies turn up Rahab shelters them from the Canaanite authorities. She and her family are offered salvation. She is told that when she sees the armies of Israel surrounding her city, that if she will tie a scarlet cord from her window, all in her house will be saved. Through faith in God's offer of reconciliation, Rahab is saved, and given exceptional honour in Israel's history. She obeyed, was spared, and gets a mention centuries later in the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah. Rahab is woven into Israel's national fabric.

But ask yourself why has the writer of Joshua put Rahab in his book before the conquest begins? I think it's because God is showing right up front that His war is not about ethnic war of cleansing. Even Canaanites with dubious professions who turn to Him will be saved. The war is not about racial or religious hatred.

THE CAPTAIN OF THE LORD'S ARMY.

The next major story relative to the battle of Jericho is when Joshua is by himself. Like any military commander he is surveying the enemy city. And behold, as Joshua lifts up his eyes, he sees "a man standing opposite him with his sword drawn in his hand, and Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you for us or for our adversaries?" (Joshua 5:13).

Ah. We expect the Angel of the Lord to confirm to Joshua that God is for him and for Israel and against the Canaanites. Isn't that what "holy war" is all about? Your side with God versus 'them'? Not at all. That's not what

the Bible says. For the Divine messenger, with sword drawn, says, “Neither side! I am come as Captain of the host of the LORD.”

This statement is counter-intuitive. Especially so in that ancient context. The Angel declares, “I am not on either side.” Everybody must follow God’s good and holy demands. God is thus making it quite clear that the war is not about xenophobic genocide. The war is not about ethnic cleansing. It’s not about ethnic superiority or inferiority. It’s about God establishing His kingdom on earth.

ACHAN.

Further confirmation that the war in Canaan was not about God playing ethnic favourites comes in the story of Achan. Achan was an Israelite who got greedy with the spoils from Jericho. Against God’s clear instructions, he stole some highly valuable gold and silver items and hid them under his tent. Thus Achan brought dishonour to Israel and her God. Such plunder, amongst other things, would send the wrong message to the Canaanites that all Israel was in it for was for the booty, the spoils of war. But that’s not what this war was about.

The rest of the story is about how God exposed this Israelite and how he paid for his insulting crime by being stoned to death. So you can see, God was not playing favourites. Canaan was a land of rapacious greed and wicked oppression and abominable practices such as prostitution and child sacrifices. It was a truly debauched society.

As John Dixon aptly remarks,

“It would be inappropriate to accept the brute fact of the military stories in Joshua but overlook these key narrative markers about *how to read* the stories. If the so called ‘new atheism’ had a few more literati instead of a preponderance of physical scientists, it might be a different kind of movement. It certainly would pause more often to understand what the Bible is saying and how it is saying it instead of simply mining the text for stories to complain about.”⁶

TRANSCULTURAL

Still, the idea that the God of the Bible judges nations through war and calamity, is highly offensive. It’s a very unpopular idea this, that God is the God who will judge sin, no matter in whom it is found. In our society we warm willingly to the idea that God readily forgives. But the message that God has set a Day of Judgment in which he will judge the world’s inhabitants and punish evil, seems laughable. If the God of the Bible is a God of love, then He should forgive and accept everybody. He should not get angry at people. That storyline suits our easy-going society.

Timothy Keller puts this objection into its cultural perspective. He writes:

“In one of my after-service discussions a woman told me that the very idea of a judging God was offensive. I said, ‘Why aren’t you offended by the idea of a forgiving God?’ She looked puzzled. I continued, ‘I respectfully urge you to consider your cultural location when you find the Christian teaching about hell offensive.’ I went on to point out that secular Westerners get upset by the Christian doctrines of hell, but they find biblical teaching about turning the other cheek and forgiving enemies appealing. I then asked her to consider how someone from a very different culture sees Christianity. In traditional societies the teaching about ‘turning the other cheek’ makes absolutely no sense. It offends people’s deepest instincts about what is right. For them the doctrine of a God of judgement, however, is no problem at all. That society is repulsed by aspects of Christianity that Western people enjoy, and are attracted by the aspects that secular Westerners can’t stand.

“Why, I concluded, should Western cultural sensibilities be the final court in which to judge whether Christianity is valid? I asked the woman gently whether she thought her culture superior to non-Western

⁶ Dixon, John. *A Doubter’s Guide To The Bible*. Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2014. p91

ones. She immediately answered 'no'. 'Well then,' I asked, 'why should your culture's objections to Christianity trump theirs?'

Tim Keller's point is potent and valid. Christianity is not the product of any one culture. The faith of the Bible is transcultural. The truth is God's truth, God's word, and at some points it's definitely going to offend somebody's cultural sensitivities. God's word and God's standards are going to offend both Israelites and Canaanites.

NON-VIOLENCE

Now you may object and say, "Violence breeds violence." If you believe in a God of judgment, that will lead to a more brutal society. If you believe in a God who smites sinners, then you may think it perfectly justified to do some of the smiting yourself. God is after all on your side!

A first hand witness of the ethnic violence in the Balkans, the Croatian Christian, Miroslav Volf does not see the doctrine of the judgment of God as creating more violence. He wrote,

"If God were not angry at injustice and deception and did not make a final end to violence --- that God would not be worthy of worship ... The only means of prohibiting all recourse to violence by ourselves is to insist that violence is legitimate only when it comes from God ... My thesis that the practice of non-violence requires a belief in divine vengeance will be unpopular with many ... in the West." ⁷

What Volf is saying, is that in his observation it is *the lack of belief in the God of judgment that fosters violence!* How so? Well, it is a natural human response to injustice and crimes to seek vengeance. "Blood cries for blood." The perpetrator has to pay. Justice must be seen to be done. And if I don't feel justice is being done to redress the crime, then I am very likely to want to take revenge into my own hands.

So, if I don't believe that ultimately God is going to put all wrongs to right, if I don't believe God is going to vindicate me and make reparation, then I will in all likelihood take up the sword and start slashing and slicing myself. I will get sucked into the whirlpool of the cycle of violence. It's only when I am convinced that God is going to judge all men for their deeds will I refrain from taking vengeance into my own hands.

The Nobel Prize winning Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz, agrees. In his essay, "The Discreet Charms of Nihilism", Milosz remembers how Karl Marx famously said that religion is the opiate of the people. Marx said the promise of the afterlife only encouraged the poor working class people to put up with social injustice. But Milosz continued,

"And now we are witnessing a transformation. A true opium of the people is a belief in nothingness after death --- the huge solace of thinking that our betrayals, greed, cowardice, murders are not going to be judged ...[but] all religions recognize that our deeds are imperishable." ⁸

Milosz agrees that it is *the lack of belief in a God of judgment that actually breeds violence!* It works like this: If I am free to take matters into my own hands without any care or thought that I am going to one day answer to a holy God who hates sin, then to hell with any consequences. Stating it positively, if I believe that God's justice is going to catch up with the wicked, then I will promote non-violence and practice reconciliation. If I leave my case with God, He has promised, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay" (Romans 12:17-21). The Bible assures me, "Our God is a consuming fire" and that "to fall into His Hands is a fearful thing" (Hebrews 12:29).

Deep within every human being is the desire and belief that there must be justice in this universe. Dan Barker who believes the Bible is full of immoral precepts, comments this way on Jesus' beatitude, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy"...

"There is a potential dark side to this verse. Many believers are eager to forgive the sins of their pastors, priests and other church leaders, unwilling to denounce them or to seek criminal or civil justice when they

⁷ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, Abingdon, 1996, pp303 and as quoted by Timothy Keller in Op. Cit., p74

⁸ Czeslaw Milosz, *The Discreet Charm of Nihilism*. New York Review of Books, November, 19, 1998 and as quoted by Timothy Keller in Op. Cit., p75

commit crimes. This is painfully evident in the many cases of pedophilia and child abuse by priests and ministers. Many church members rally to the support of the minister, consoling him with ‘mercy’ in his time of need --- while blaming or ignoring the victims. If this beatitude produces such a lack of accountability, then it is truly an evil verse.”⁹

So, did you spot Barker’s inconsistency? Did you see how he just shot himself in the foot? Barker abhors the fact that God sent Israel into the land of Canaan to judge their child sacrifices and other abominations. Yet he cries out, as every decent person does, for judgment to be meted out upon pedophiles in the churches. Deep down Barker wants God to be just and to act in judgment!

IMPRECATORY PSALMS

One of the things that makes Dan Barker and the other so called New Atheists reject the Bible as bad for morality is what we call the imprecatory Psalms. You know the ones where the psalmist pleads with God to bring the Hand of judgement upon his enemies? Psalm 137 is a classic imprecatory psalm. It is the sad and broken cry from the land of exile, from the captivity of Babylon. You know the one:

“By the rivers of Babylon, There we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion. Upon the willows in the midst of it, we hung our harps, for there our captors demanded of us songs, and our tormentors mirth, saying, ‘Sing us one of the songs of Zion’” (Ps. 137:1-3).

The psalmist is in no mood for singing. ‘How can we sing?’ he opines. [Babylon has burnt our homes, razed our temple, slaughtered our families, ripped us from our land, and taken us to be servants in a strange place.] But then, through gritted teeth he cries out for justice and calls down calamity upon his captors,

“Remember, O LORD, against the sons of Edom the day of Jerusalem, who said, Raze it, raze it, to its very foundation.’ O daughter of Babylon, you devastator, How blessed will be the one who repays you with the recompense with which you have repaid us, How blessed will be the one who seizes and dashes your little ones against the rock” (Ps. 137:7-9).

What a field day the skeptics have with this one. Fancy praying that God would bring judgment upon their captors by dashing their babies to pieces! There you go, the Bible only encourages violence and immoral behaviour! Well, my answer to that is this prayer for vengeance is very understandable. If you have suffered the rape and pillage and plunder of your home and family, and if you have seen your little ones mercilessly cut in two, then it would be very natural for your heart to cry out for vengeance. It’s very easy being an armchair theologian until you yourself suffer heartless cruelty.

But the point is that the psalmist leaves the question of judgment with God. He does not become a vigilante. It is precisely because he believes God will put it to rights, that he brings his cause to the throne of Heaven and leaves it all in God’s hands. The violence of the ungodly will not be perpetrated by the man of faith. The cycle of violence stops. He gets up from his knees and leaves vengeance with the God of heaven.

WHY DOESN’T GOD STEP IN?

The Book of Joshua teaches that God does sometimes act in history through the instrumentality of war and natural calamity. When nations and societies reach levels of evil that His patience can no longer tolerate, then God acts in judgment. The Book of Joshua teaches us that God has in the past meted out justice through the calamity of war. The Book of Joshua illustrates in verifiable history that God is a God of Justice and fairness. The Book of Joshua is a verifiable ‘historical marker’ assuring us that God’s promise of a final and ultimate Judgment Throne where all wrongs will be addressed is no idle threat for those intent on ignoring His word.

“If He never displayed his judgment in verifiable history, we might doubt that he really is the God of justice that the Bible claims. We might conclude that promises of future judgment were just idle threats of a moralistic culture. But God gave a limited, concrete, and entirely just ‘historical marker’ that would echo through the ages as a sign of the reality of his judgment. God did to the Canaanites what we wish

⁹ Dan Barker, OP. Cit., pp 198

he'd done on the 'killing fields' or at Auschwitz. He did it *once* to show he is serious --- *only* once so we might know his mercy." ¹⁰

John Dixon makes a great point, but I think he does not go far enough. People often ask, Why didn't God step in and stop the Nazis? Why didn't God step in and stop Imperial Japan? Why didn't God step in and stop the race crimes of apartheid in South Africa? Why doesn't God step in and judge ISIS? My question is, what makes you so sure He didn't, isn't, and that He won't? When the Nazis and Japanese awoke the sleeping giant of America and dragged her unwillingly into WWII, who is to say this was not God's hand of judgment on that evil engulfing the world? But you can guarantee that unless the United States and other allies repent of their current rejection of the God of the Bible, that just as God judged Israel later for her wickedness, that God will also judge us for abandoning His word.

Dixon seems to suggest (though I seriously doubt he really would) that God has only acted once in history to judge a certain nation, the Canaanites. Dixon writes that,

"The New Testament makes clear (repeatedly) that the judgment of Canaan was a limited historical sign of what will occur on a global scale when Jesus judges the world. And yet, mercy always remains on offer. Just as the book of Joshua begins with the story of Rahab, so the book of Revelation uses literary cues, right in the middle of its judgment scenes, to assure readers that God wishes to pardon those who deserve his punishment." ¹¹

The Bible teaches that God's "wrath is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men" (Romans 1:18). The Bible teaches there is a Day coming when God will open the books in judgement and will,

"Repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day ..." (2 Thess. 1: 6-10).

TSUNAMI

Throughout history the God of heaven has given us 'historical markers' as illustrations of His judgment in history, as prophetic markers to His coming judgment. A chilling reminder of the importance of such historical warnings comes from the awful 2011 tsunami that devastated the low-lying regions of the east coast of Japan ...

The waves, of up to 40 metres, traveled 10 kilometres inland, leaving 20,000 people dead. But most of us don't realise that the hills along the east coast of Japan are dotted with hundreds of historical stone markers, some 600 years old. These are ancient warnings not to build below certain lines on account of the remembered tsunamis. In the the town of Aneyoshi one reads:

"High dwellings are the peace and harmony of our descendants. Remember the calamity of the great tsunamis. Do not build any homes below this point."

One stone marker in Kesenuma states:

"Always be prepared for unexpected tsunamis. Choose life over your possessions and valuables." ¹²

We humans tend not to learn the lessons of the past. But it is the joy of wisdom to heed the historical markers of the past, to learn the lessons of God's actions in history. The people of the town of Aneyoshi were wise and built above the markers, and their town was spared the 2011 tsunami. According to the Book of Joshua, the conquest

¹⁰ Op. Cit., *A Doubter's Guide To The Bible*, p 94

¹¹ Ibid, p 96

¹² I am thankful to John Dixon for this illustration, who himself acknowledges his source from Jay Alabaster in *Tsunami-Hit Towns Forgot Warnings from Ancestors*, Associated Press, April 6, 2011.

of Canaan is one historical marker warning us that God has and will judge the nations. Sure, every town in Canaan was offered terms of peace. Only one town and a few individuals wisely repented and were spared.

THE CROSS

Of course, the supreme “historical marker” God has erected in history is the cross of Jesus Christ. For when God laid on him the iniquity of us all, God was announcing that no matter where sin is found, it must be judged ... even in His own beloved Son. But in his judgment God was offering mercy to any and all who will turn from their selfish ways and accept his terms of Gospel peace.

Each of us has a significant choice to make ... either live as decent citizens in His coming Kingdom of glory, or get out:

“Do not be deceived. Those who practice immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envyings, drunkenness, carousings and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not enter the kingdom of God” (Gal. 5:19-21)

Like in Joshua’s day, like in modern day Japan, not many want to believe this gospel-word and prepare for the day when He will open the books and “judge each man according to his works.” Not too many are accepting God’s mercy in Jesus Christ.

The Bible upholds the morals of a good and holy God in heaven. Behold then, both the goodness and the severity of God.